Strange Pleasures by BlueM0nd4y

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Summary:

Billy doesn't die in Starcourt. Instead, he wakes up at the Byers, after two days spent being passed out, with a strange new super power, a nosy Steve Harrington who starts to insistently look after him and a lot of screaming brats in his life.

A story of redemption and self acceptance. Warning: awkward flirting, macho bullshit, teenagers being teenagers, Billy being a mess,

Steve overthinking about everything.

1. Children of the grave

Author's Note:

- Translation into Italiano available: Strange Pleasures by VeneredìRimmel

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hullo!
>
> If it's the first time for you here, you need to know that there's a harder better faster stronger version of this fic:
> here
>
> beta-read, improved and partially rewrite by Lumina_Solaris :)
>
> this one's all me.

"She was pretty. She was really pretty."

El gently caresses Billy's cheek, a gesture that looks odd on Billy Hargrove. He nods, and a lone tear drops on the girl. "And you… you were happy." she continues, her voice full of soft kindness. They stare at each other for a brief, intense moment. A look that contains a lot of unspoken truth and shared traumas. It's enough to make Billy himself again. The connection between them is solid built. He let her know about him, his past, his pain. She saw him like no one else ever did.

A sudden urge of protectiveness rises in Billy's chest. He has spent his miserable life thinking about himself, being the most grade A asshole in history. Now he knows what to do. For once in his life, he feels the need of taking care of someone else.
He stands in front of the monster, full of pride and determination. He can't feel anything but adrenaline, a raging fire in his spine. He clenches his jaw and his fist and stares at the big, black mass without hesitation or fear. The monster makes a long, horrible screech. Billy

knows that it is about to attack, he can feel it. There is still that connection between him and the beast, but now he's not scared anymore. Now he has control.

El looks at him with wide eyes, terrified. She clumsily retreats, pointing her elbows to the ground. Billy, promptly planting his feet, talks to the horrible creature. His loud voice resonated through the big hall.

"BACK. OFF."
And the beast retreats, slightly. It looks like it's trying to attack them, but a mysterious, powerful force is keeping it planted. Billy takes a step forward.

"I SAID BACK OFF!" he shouts, and he's trembling, his body full of rage and nervous energy. This time, the Mind Flayed does what has been ordered, with a loud, metallic screech. Blood starts dripping from Billy's nose, while the beast is trying to free itself from that invisible force that is blocking its movements.

From the stands, Dustin, Will, Steve, Robin, Nancy and Jonathan are watching the scene, incredulous.
"Holy fucking shit…" breathes Dustin. "What the hell… what is he doing?" speaks Steve, eyes wide in shock. The beast starts screeching louder and Billy raises a hand toward it, both his nostrils are now bleeding.
"Guys! Now!"
Nancy is the first one that collects some common sense. Whatever Billy is doing to the beast, is clear that he can't go on for a long time. The boy is shaking and looks like on the verge of giving up. It looks like it takes a lot of energy, keeping the gigantic monster steady.
So they all start to throw fireworks. It's an explosion of outbursts and light, and Billy knows that he can finally give up. He falls on the ground, breathing as he had just run a marathon, dizzy from exhaustion. Gentle hands grab his shoulders, but he is too tired to look whose hands are. He's too tired to think, surrounded by loud bangs and flashing lights. He thinks that he hears a voice, soothing, but he doesn't know what the voice is telling him. He can't hear, he can't see. He slowly closes his eyes, and suddenly is just blackness, and silence.

"Holy shit! Is he dead?" Dustin yells at the sight of the unconscious boy in Max's arm. For some odd reason, she tightens her grip even more, strangely protective towards her asshole stepbrother.
"He's breathing, asshole." she moves a blond curl from his front. Billy has a strange expression on his ever-angry face. Like that, he looks oddly calm, almost placid. Steve sighs, his palms on his hips like an angry mother. He looks around, pensive. "So is finished? Is that thing gone once for all?" El nods, still sitting on the dirty floor, hugged with Mike. "The gate is closed. No more Mind Flyer."
Steve points a finger on the sleeping figure of Billy, with an eyebrow raised in a very stupid perplexed expression. "What about Hargrove? Is still flayed or something? Shouldn't we… dunno, tie him?" at this proposition, Robin slowly turns her head toward the brunette, giving him a glare that suggests a *what the fuck, Harrington*. But Dustin, of course, stands for his beloved hero.
"Steve is right. The guy is dangerous. Even without the Mind Flayer, he's still a sociopath." Max scoffs. "He's not going to hurt anybody. I guess. Besides, he's fainted or something. See?" to reprove what she's saying, she grabs Billy's arm and drops it. His forearm hits the floor and there's no sign of life or reaction in Billy's face.
Still, Mike isn't convinced. "He tried to kill my girlfriend. We should drop him by the quarry now that he can't resist." Robin glares at him. "Yeah, let's kill him while he's asleep. Very brave, kid." "It's not like he's better." states Lucas, disgusted. For reflex, Max crushes his step bother's shoulder, annoyed. "Don't you dare! He's an asshole, but he's my brother!" "Stepbrother!" Lucas corrects, and then they all start to shout to each other, a loud concert of screaming kids that instantly annoys Steve's guts.
"Shut the hell up everybody!" he intervenes, authoritarian. "Nobody is gonna kill nobody. We just… take him with us to the Byers' place and see what to do. Over!"
Everybody mumble something but it looks like Steve's outburst has been effective. Robin rolls her eyes. "Woa, dingus. Severe mother, aren't you?" "Shut up." spats Steve, flushing slightly. "Just help me move this grade a dickhead here." Steve grabs Billy under his arms, after a failed attempt that makes the unconscious boy fall on the cold ground. He's sure to have heard a dangerous 'thump' produced by the collision of Billy's cranium to the floor, but he doesn't give a shit. Jonathan and Robin grab the boy's ankles and they start clumsily to move him towards the exit of the mall.

"God, he’s heavy." Stave laments. "No shit, dingus."

In the beginning, Billy thinks he got drunk the previous night. He can’t remember anything, his head is aching, pounding badly. He feels sick, like he is really about to throw up, and every single fiber of his body is screaming in pain. His sight is blurry, and his senses are crashed by dizziness and confusion. He’s in a bed, definitely, but it doesn’t look like a hospital. He’s in a room, but he can’t recognize whose.

He tries to get up, but a sudden pain keeps him anchored to his spot. What the fuck happened? Did he sleep with someone? Judging by the horrendous wallpaper, looks like an elder person. Holy shit, did he managed to fuck missis Wheeler? Sure that room doesn’t look like her style, it’s shabby and badly furnished. It looks like a lower-class person room, like their shithole home there in Hawkins. Missis Wheeler is more fashionable than that. Besides, his head is really spinning and aching. He had never had a hungover like that. Did he do drugs? Back in Cali he used to snort coke and drop an acid once in a while. But he had lost the habit in that shithole town. It was a miracle that they know even the existence of weed.

He tries again to get up and groans in pain. This time, he manages to get a prone position. Then, the door opens with a slam, and a gang of thirteen years old kids rush towards him, screaming. Lucas Sinclair is pointing a sling to his face. "Are you the Mind Flayer?!" he yells. Mike elbows him. "Dude, do you think the Mind Flayer would declare itself like that?! Are you fuckin stupid?!" "Mike has a point." Dustin agrees, pointing Sarah Fawcett hairspray in Billy’s face. "He likes to hide." "I can’t feel him…" Will weakly tries, ignored by his friends that are yelling at each other.

Billy stops to listen to them immediately. He looks at Max, who is staring at him, a worried expression on her freckled face.
- "Max. Make them shut up or I swear I will kill them, eat from their fuckin skulls and dance on their fuckin graves." despite the threat, his voice comes out strangely collected. Max nods, then turns towards her friends.

"SILENCE, SHITBIRDS!"

Everyone stops instantly to argue. She looks again at him, visibly concerned. "How are you?" Billy scoffs. "Why the fuck do you care?!" but then, a slightly odd sense of guilt pervades him. "…Like shit. Head hurts like fuck." he adds almost immediately. Then, he points at the group of geeks with a small movement of his chin, because he's too pained to move everything else. "What are they doing here? Where am I?"
Max looks behind her, at her friends, then sighs. "Byers." "BYERS?!" Billy snaps, and he is almost immediately hit by a sudden wave of pain in his limbs. What the hell? Why is he so broken?! He has never, never in his life felt like this. Not even after the worst beatings of Neil.
Max pushes him to the bed with a hand on his chest. "You were out for two days, Billy. You slept all the time." "What… what happened?" Billy can't believe what his step sister is saying. It doesn't make any fuckin sense.
The nerd club shares some secret acknowledgement glares. Then, Mike speaks. "You have been flayed." "The fuck?!" "Flayed." repeats Dustin, slowly, like he's talking with some stupid first-grade kid. "The Mind Flayer is the black monster. He has been controlling you, you were his meat puppet."
Billy snorts, irritated. If he wouldn't be so much in pain, he sure had insulted the stupid toothless kid. "Is this some kind of prank? I'm sorry I don't speak nerd. What the fuck that supposed to mean? Uh?"

Max speaks quietly. She looks pensive. "You don't… remember, Billy?" "Remember what?!" The boy is becoming more and more irritated, it is clearly. "No I don't, Maxine. I just remember driving, that I was about to fuck Karen Wheeler and then I hit something with the Camaro."
Mike whitens, shocked. "YOU WHAT?!" Billy looks at him, impassive. He didn't remember that the kid was misses Wheeler's child, but he doesn't give a flying fuck. "YOU SON OF A BITCH!" Mike snaps towards the boy, withheld by Dustin and Lucas. Despite the pain he's feeling, Billy manages to grin lasciviously. "Oh, I'm sorry, Wheeler. Did I just ruin the perfect picture of your family? Sure your mom needs someone that can give her what your old man can't."

Mike squirms even more, red by pure rage. "HOLY SHIT! I FUCKIN KILL YOU! MAX, LET ME KILL HIM!" Max scoffs. "Chill out, Mike. He's just messing with you. You're giving him satisfaction, stop this whiny theater." At these words, Mike starts to compose himself. With a loud groan, he shakes off Lucas and Dustin's grip, then he walks towards the exit. "He's awake for like what, one minute? And I just can't stand him anymore. I'm out. Good luck with finding out if he's still flayed." after that, he leaves the room, under the apprehensive looks of his friends.

Billy sighs. "The kid's a dramatic bitch." Max glares at him, but decides to ignore his stepbrother's manners. "And you're an asshole." she spats, flatly. "So, what about after the incident? Do you remember anything? Anything or anyone like… Heather?" this time, Max's words seem to hit a nerve on Billy, somehow. His expression becomes more upset.
Heather. He remembers. They are just flash, but he do remember. He remembers kidnap her and take her to the shadow. He remembers the shadow telling him to do so.
A sudden wave of anxiety hits him. What the fuck did he do? Something really, really fucked up. Something way beyond destroying Harrington's face or fucking desperate housewives.

He swallows. He doesn't want to show them his fear, his raising angst. So, with all the force in the world, he tries at the best to keep an expressionless poker face, and stare right into Max's deep blue eyes.
"Nope."
"He's lying!" Lucas snaps immediately. "He's still flayed! Max, he's dangerous!" the redhead ignores her boyfriend, still keeping eye contact with Billy, in the attempt to read her fucked up stepbrother. "Do you remember what happened at Starcourt?" Billy gasps. Startcourt. El. The shadow. Him, telling the shadow what to do. The shadow, obeying him. That was beyond fucked up. Then, he manages to disguise his emotions again, even if his distress is now too evident. He snaps, angry, defensive. He feels trapped, exposed. Trapped by nosy teenagers. That's so low.

"What the fuck happened in Starcourt?! Did you piss your panties?! Jesus, Max, you're really pissing me off here. Stop this third grade,

for god's sake. I have nothing to tell you." this time, Max gets angry too, her patience has reached the limit. "You're lying! We're trying to help you, here, asshole! Why do you have to be always like that?!" "Like WHAT?!" "Like… like YOU! After all that happened in these days, you were controlled, Billy! You were manipulated by a gigantic, creepy monster! You kidnaped people! You fucking tried to strangle El!"

Billy is mute. He really doesn't know what to say. That sense of guilt is starting to grip his chest, his throat. He feels the tears, pounding harshly in his eyes. But he can't give up. He can't break now.

"Don't you understand the situation?! Could you give up being so stubborn?!" Max continues, calmer this time. Dustin, Lucas and Will are simply staring at them, speechless and worried.
After a moment of silence that looks eternal, Billy scoffs. "You're a crazy bitch." he spats, venomously. Max exhales the loudest groan ever, rolling her eyes. "FINE! Fuck you, Billy!" "NO." Billy feels rage. Rage is good. He can deal with that. "FUCK YOU. Maxine."

They stare at each other with pure, intense, hate, then, the sound of the door opening again collects their attention. Steve Harrington is planted on the door jamb, his face looks like shit, beaten. Billy can't avoid thinking how he looks so stupid, with that pissed expression on his pretty bruised face and his stupid pink preppy polo shirt and his stupid perfect hair and his stupid… everything. God. He hates him so much.

"No, fuck you both, guys. You're loud. I was taking a nap." Harrington sighs, somehow not touched by the situation.

Billy manages to make an ugly laugh that costs him a sudden pain in his limbs. "Harrington? What the fuck are you doing here? Still creeping around my kid sister, aren't you?"
The brunette scoffs, annoyed. "God, Hargrove, you're such a banal, walking cliché." ouch. Somehow, that hurts. Then, Harrington looks at the kids. "Guys, why don't you leave this to elders?" The four of them nod. "It's all yours, Steve. I'm tired of his bullshit." declares Max, heavy. She walks away, giving her back to Billy, who snaps at her, irritated. "Hey! Where the fuck are you going?! We're finished when I say we're finished, Maxine!" his sister responds just with a

middle finger. God! Since when she's such a badass?! Billy groans, and the kids leave him with Steve fuckin Harrington, who approaches him by the side of the bed, with an unreadable expression on his face. Billy stares at him, keeping eye contact like a challenge. Harrington looks concentrated and slightly disgusted.
He is, disgusted. Billy thinks. Steve Harrington is fuckin disgusted by him. He can deal with that.

"She's really trying to help you, man. You shouldn't be like that." Harrington states after a while. Billy rolls his eyes. "Oh, I'm touched. Now I will open up my heart to her and talk about my feelings all night." "Yeah, yeah. Original, Hargrove." "You look like shit." Billy comments, staring at the purple bruises on Steve's eye. "You really can't take a fight, Harrington. Who beat you this time?" "None of your business, Hargrove." "Oh I think it is, princess. I wish I could offer a beer to the guy." Steve smirks, totally unaffected by the other boy's manners. God, this is boring! Billy is itching for a fight. At least, a verbal one. He can't deal with the amount of anxiety that is hiding secretly in his chest, he needs a distraction and Steve Harrington is the perfect candidate for that.

"Why am I here again?" Billy asks after a while. He really didn't understand a shit of what the brats were saying. Not that he had paid too much attention to the details…
"We brought you here. You were unconscious, after you… dunno, talked to the Mind Flayer? Ordered him what to do?" "I don't have any idea of what freaking horseshit are you babbling about, Harrington. Those kids hit you hard in the head with their D&D bullshit." Billy lies. He has an idea, a vague, creepy idea. He remembers that monster. He couldn't forget the shadow that has been terrorizing him for days. "Yeah, yeah, sure." Harrington sighs, rolling his eyes. "How are you feeling?" he asks then. Billy lifts an eyebrow, surprised. "Aww, are you worried about me? What, do you want to adopt me like your bunch of nerd kids?" now, Harrington is starting to look pissed. Billy decides that he can continue workin on it. "What? Are you tired of babysitting thirteen years old? You want someone that can stand you now?" the brunette scoffs. "You're so full of shit, Hargrove. All cocky and full of yourself, but I bet you're just a talking, big mouth. All bark and no bite."

Billy grins, feeling the excitement raising from his stomach. Finally, a reaction. He got what he was looking for. "Didn't look like it when I broke your pretty face." "With a fuckin plate! Because you're a fuckin cheating asshole. Besides, you're not in the position to speak so high of yourself, now that you're stuck in the bed like an eighty old man. I bet you can't even go to the bathroom without the help of a nurse."

Ouch. Touché. Billy grimaces, wordless. Harrington is right. He is really not in the position to act cocky. After a few seconds of tense, dense silence, he decides to go for a threat. "Wait that I'll be back on track, Harrington, and we will have round two. We will see who's all talking between us."

They stare at each other. The electricity is palpable. Then, someone at the door interrupts their staring contest.
"For god's sake! Are you finished here? I really can't stand this macho bullshit." A girl is on the door jamb, her arm crossed on the chest. They were so concentrated on hating each other that they haven't heard her arrival.
"He started it!" Harrington whines, with a girly, high pitched voice. The blondie scoffs and rolls her eyes. Billy thinks that she's not bad. She is kinda hot. Not that it is his material of interest. Who is this chick? Is she Steve's girlfriend?
"I'm sorry. Who the fuck are you?" Billy asks, flatly. She ignores him and stands next to Harrington, her arms still crossed and an annoyed sassy expression on her cute face. "If he's babbling this much, he's fine, dingus." she tells her friend. "Besides, he doesn't look possessed to me." she adds, staring at Billy, who's gripping the blankets, with an odd feeling of uneasiness. He doesn't like being this exposed. Before the brats, then Harrington and his chick. He wants to go home. Well, maybe he doesn't want the home, but somewhere when he can gain energy the fuck away from all those freaks.

"Indeed." Harrington agrees. "He looks the same asshole that I knew to me. Pretty much." The blond chick points a torch to Billy's eyes, who immediately turns his head with a moan. "Ehy! Put that shit away!" he cries. His arms hurt so much that he can't raise them to protect himself.
"But his pupils are dilatated. Photosensitive." she states, like a mere scientific fact. "Maybe just because he has been sleeping for two days,

Robin." Harrington debates, then Robin finally stops that light torture. "We should try to put him in the bathtub." "Good idea. Help me grab him." "WHAT?!" Billy snaps, horrified. They move the pile of blankets from him, leaving an urge sensation of cold. Then, Harrington is grabbing him under the shoulders, and Robin by his legs. Billy feels pain, pain everywhere. And fear.
What the fuck?! Are they fuckin insane?! Why the hell are they manipulating him, like he's some sort of motionless doll?! Isn't this harassment or something?! Is Harrington really a pervy creeper like Billy had called him a few moments before?!

While they're dragging his strengthless body, Max, Lucas, Dustin, Will and Mike are watching them, wide eyes.
"What are you doing?!" asks Max, surprised. "The big boy needs to take a bath." Harrington explains, painting for the physical effort.
"FUCK YOU, HARRINGTON! I SWEAR I FUCKIN KILL YOU! YOU'RE SO DEAD! YOU'RE SO FUCKING DEAD!"
Billy has started to shout a long series of insults, while the kids are laughing at the ridiculous scene. Finally, that chick Robin and Harrington gracelessly drop him in the bathtub. The water starts to run, cold. Billy, full of pain and burning shame, notices only at that moment that he has not his clothes anymore. He's wearing plain, white t-shirt and sweatpants. If it is possible, he feels even more embarrassed.

At least, Harrington and his freaking girlfriend don't want to take his clothes off. Billy shivers at the sensation of the icy water.
"Goddamit! I'm fucking freezing my balls here!" he cries, trembling. Harrington is kneeling next to the tub and he's testing the dripping water with a hand on it. "Relax, Hargrove. Is going to heat up soon, be a patient boy." Harrington speaks mockingly, making Billy even more ashamed. He fucking hates Steve. He's going to have his revenge, sooner or later.
"You don't like it cold?" Will Byers asks shyly. Billy didn't realize the entire nerd crowd has entered the bathroom, all enjoying the shit show.

"No, I don't fuckin like the cold! I hate the cold, in fact, I fuckin hate Hawkins and I fuckin hate Indiana!" Billy whines, high pitched voice. The water is becoming more bearable. "That's a good sign? Isn't it?"

chirps Robin, sitting on the tub. "Guys, it's too soon for celebrations. Let's see how he reacts with hot water." Dustin declares, resolute. "God, this is fucking creepy." speaks Billy, but this time his voice comes out weak. "Well, for once in a life, I have to agree with Hargrove here. This is creepy." Harrington confirms, then he turns towards the nerd squad. "Is it really necessary? To have all of you here?" he asks, sounding pissed. "Are you nuts, Steve?! What if the Mind Flayer wakes up again?! We have to stick together and be prepared." Dustin objects, gaining the approval of his friends.

Billy glares at them, but he's starting to feel the warmth of the water, raising in the tub. God, this is actually pretty nice. He can't remember the last time he has been in hot water, but he actually can't remember the last days at all. He slowly lowers his head, looking at his battered body. It doesn't even seem his anymore. With hot running water, his muscles feel soothed. He raises a hand and starts to move his fingers. Harrington is watching him, mesmerized.
"Better?" he asks, after a while. Billy flinches and look at him sheepishly. He doesn't want to respond because he has nothing smart or mean to say. He's just too tired for this shit.

"Guys, I don't know but he doesn't look bothered by the water to me!" announces Steve, his arms opened wide. Will nods, looking concentrated. Billy thinks that the kid is kind of creepy, with his big staring eyes. "He's not flayed anymore. I can tell it, he's not here." says the kid.
Everyone exchanges glances. "I'm not sure." states Mike after a while. "We should control him with El." suggests Lucas, causing the irritation of his friend. "El is not a weapon! Do you remember what happened to her last time she dove in his sick skull?!" Mike points a finger towards Billy, who makes an annoyed grimace. "Besides, El doesn't have her powers anymore. She needs to gain them back, she needs to rest!"
The kids start again to argue loud, but Billy is ignoring them. The bathtub is full, and he's covered in dirt and encrusted blood, so, fuck that shit. He makes a painful attempt to take off his t-shirt, causing a moan of pain from his mouth. Steve instantly reaches him, grabbing the shirt. "Wait, let me help." "I don't need your help, Harrington!" "Doesn't look like it to me." "Well, screw you!" "Oh my god! You're a fucking child you know that Hargrove?! You're like, five years old!"

"At least I don’t hang out with fucking kids!" "Oh, come on, seriously?!"

They’re arguing while Steve is struggling in the attempt to take Billy’s shirt off. The scene is so absurd that everybody is just staring at them, perplexed. Robin decides to intervene for the best.
"Ok guys, time out. Steve, help him and stop giving him shit."
At these words, Steve gasps, shocked. "It’s exactly what I’m trying to do here, Robin! He’s making it impossible because he’s thick neanderthal idiot assh…" "AND" Robin interrupts him, calling on everybody else. "We can leave them alone, he’s not possessed, he doesn’t need an audience right now."
Billy looks at her, slightly surprised. That is exactly what he needs at that moment, to the people to fuck off and stop annoying him. He’s weak, ashamed, exposed, physically exposed, and scared. He doesn’t want to show that, and he doesn’t want people to know.

Everybody gets out, leaving just Steve and Billy. Steve makes a new attempt to take off Billy’s wet shirt, but this time he manages to do so, Billy is not opposing resistance anymore.
"Your girlfriend looks smart to me. How come she’s together with an idiot like you?" Billy spats, venomously, looking straight to the other guy’s eyes. Steve looks surprised, probably because Billy just called Robin 'smart' and he doesn’t expect him to be capable of giving compliments. "Robin? We’re so not dating." Steve tells, flat voice, while he puts some bubble bath in the tub. Billy tries to ignore the embarrassment caused by the fact that Steve is really preparing the bath like he’s a five year old toddler. "Why do you care?" asks then the brunette. "You’re right. I don’t."

Steve grabs the waistband of Billy’s sweatpants, but a sudden jolt of the boy stops him. "What the fuck do you think you’re doing, Harrington?!" Billy sounds less threatening and more freaked. Steve tries to catch back his own embarrassment for the absurd situation. "I’m helping you, dumbass! stop being a child!" "Who gave you the permission to undress me like a fucking chick?!" "Nobody. And I don’t need that. Because you’re an ass." Steve is back to the waistband. He pauses a moment, and Billy is glaring at him with all his energy left. The brunette makes a small, malicious smirk. "What’s the problem, Hargrove? Are you afraid to let me find out the reason why you’re

always this angry?" Billy reddens for rage and shame. Damn he is going to beat Harrington so bad, as soon as he's back being himself and not that weak wreck.

"You're a fucking piece of sh…" Billy can't continue, a quick movement of Steve interrupts him and in a moment he's totally naked. He gasps and turns towards the wall to hide his embarrassment. He can feel the derisive eyes of Harrington pointed on him.
"See? It wasn't a big deal. Besides, I've seen your dick plenty of times after practice, I don't know what's to be this shy all of a sudden. You're really all talking, Hargrove." Mocks the guy, and Billy wants to kill him, so soo much.
"Fuck you, Harrington. I'm going to kill you, you know that?" "Yeah, yeah. Are you ok here? You want me to do something else?"
"JESUS, Harrington!" Billy is shouting now, way beyond the exasperation. "Just get the fuck out of here! Leave me the fuck alone, goddamit!"
Harrington raises his hands, submissive. "Got it. Give us a call if you die in the tub." Billy wishes he could debate that is actually impossible and ridiculous, but the less he speaks the better he gets. He doesn't want to share another single word with Steve fucking Harrington.

Steve exits the bathroom, finding a whole crowd staring at him. His neck reddens suddenly, and he feels like an idiot for the brief exchange of mockeries that he had just had with Hargrove. Of course they were eavesdropping all the time. Robin has her trademark grin, and looks about to say something stupid or embarrassing. "What?! What are you looking at?!" he babbles, then, he surpasses them with a slight shove.

2. Where did you sleep last night?

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hi girls & guys! I really enjoy writing this story, so I really hope that there's someone who likes reading it too :)
> This is my first ff, but I don't know I got sooo many ideas that will be difficult to put them all in a single story. Writing keeps my mind busy and helps me avoid a nervous breakdown due to the difficult historical period lol
>
> I'm sorry if there is bad phrasing, I try my best. I feel very insecure about my writing, I write a lot of stuff but in my own language, usually... but I have to practice :)

Billy manages to get dressed by himself, and it's a huge hit, after all, even it took almost twenty minutes where he refuses to let anyone in the bathroom. Will has brought him his brother's clothes again, another pair of sweatpants and a Ramones t-shirt. Billy takes the offer without thanking and without saying anything, better the kid than Harrington, after all.

"Where's your freak brother again?" he asks to the little guy before he leaves the room. Will doesn't seem smitten by the mocking name that Billy has used. "Work. He will be home soon." he explains, with a shrug. "Can't wait." spats Billy, sarcastically.
He finds himself thinking of his work too. How many days has he been out? Is he fired? Which day is it?

Everything has been so sudden and confused, and he doesn't have any idea of what happened, just flashing painful memories that he really doesn't want to recollect.
He opens the door, and a nice strong smell of food strikes him. His stomach responds to the calling too, growling. With infinite effort, he slowly walks to the main room. Steve Harrington is cooking, laughing and joking with the blondie chick. Will and Max are sitting at the table, playing a stupid card game and giggling aloud. There is no

trace of the other brats. The scene is so happy and domestic that Billy almost wants to puke. He looks at them and then at the room, is strange to see that house again. The last time he was there he had woken up on the floor, knocked out by a fucking syringe that Max had implanted in his neck.

Finally, everyone notices him standing on the door jamb. Harrington smiles, and Billy is overwhelmed by a wave of nausea again. "You made it! We were starting to think that you were passed out on the bathroom floor." he exclaims cheerfully. "Not happening, pretty boy. Sorry to disappoint you." Billy mumbles, tired, then he looks at his stepsister. "Max, what do our shitty parents know about all this shit?" he asks, and he tries not to sound too worried. The truth is that he has no idea how to face Neil. He's been out for days, he's practically dead man…

Max rubs her chin, pensive. "Uhm, well, I might have told them that you were involved in the Starcourt accident. That you're staying at a friend while you recover." Billy sighs and rubs his eyes with the palms of his hands. This is bad. He's gonna get beaten shit for sure. His dad doesn't give a shit if he's been involved in an accident.
"How are you here?" he asks then. Max shrugs. "Steve gave me a lift." "And why are you here?" "I…" the redhead hesitates, uncertain. "She was worried about you, dumbass." Steve intervenes, leaning lazily to the kitchen counter. Billy instantly glares at him, nobody asks for his stupid reproach. "We need to go home." he states after a while, but Max immediately jolts on her seat.
"NO!" "No?" Billy repeats with a raised eyebrow. Max looks nervous again. "You need to rest… you're a wreck!" "Geez, thanks, shitbird." "Besides, your Camaro…" "My Camaro?" "Might be… destroyed."

A heavy silence follows by, full of tension. Then, Billy remembers: he remembers driving his beloved Camaro towards Nancy fucking Wheeler, who was trying to shoot him. He remembers Steve Harrington struck him with his fancy car at crazy speed.
That's bad. No. That's beyond bad. He feels again a distressing feeling, a sudden urge to cry and punch the wall. Instead, he turns his head towards the ceiling, in a pathetic attempt to hide his watering eyes.

Steve is staring at him, his eyes with an unbearable, sympathetic

frown of pity. Billy can't stand it. He can stand a fight, a conflict, not that. That is something that he doesn't know how to deal with. He sighs, trying to collect all his forces.
"Ok." he says after a while. Max is looking at him concerned. "Ok?" she repeats, like is the craziest thing in the world, and it is, almost, considering that they're talking about her stepbrother. His reaction to the Camaro news is beyond weird. "Ok." Billy says again, rubbing his eyes in distress.
"It's not a big deal! I mean, it is totally repairable. It just needs a little fix with the car body, that's all!" Max tries to cheer her brother up, but he has stopped listening to her. Without saying anything to anyone, he turns back and goes to the bathroom, leaving everyone speechless.

In the bathroom, he's safe from that creepers and he can finally breathe again. He feels an overwhelming sensation in his chest while he stares at his image in the mirror. He can barely recognize himself, that guy in front of him doesn't look like him. He's pale, with visible bags under his eyes, his hairs are messy, and he looks tired, almost unrecognizable.
It looks like his breath can't go back to normal, he lacks oxygen, his mind is fuzzy. It feels like a bad acid trip. A sudden wave of nausea hits him, making him rush to the toilet. What he pukes next is something that doesn't look like undigested food, doesn't like even like something that can come out from a human being. His vomit is black and dense, and smells like death. He stares wide-eyed at the horrible spectacle of something that looks more like an alive black gut, moving lazily in the toilet. He flushes, panicked, and clumsily back away until his back collides with the bath-tub. Not able to control himself anymore, he burst into a long, repressed cry, embracing himself.
Is he even human anymore? Judging by what his body has just expelled, he would say no. After all, in those last few days he had done the worst stuff, controlled by an interdimensional creepy monster. He has been a puppet of the Mind Flayer and now he's not himself anymore, not the Billy that used to be before the arrival of that monster in his life.

He gets up and watch himself in the mirror, again. He has stopped crying, the desperation has been replaced by a new sense of

emptiness, but that's better. He can deal with what. He's still staring at his own reflex when he hears a bang on the door.
"Hargrove? Are you alive, buddy?"
Of course is Steve fuckin Harrington. Billy scoffs and then opens the door, glaring at the other on the door jamb. "I'm alive. And I'm not your buddy." he states, trying to look the more collected possible, but Steve is looking at him with a frown and he has certainly noticed the redness of Billy's eyes, fresh after crying.

Billy doesn't leave the time for Steve to speak. "I need to get home. I've passed your stupid test, didn't I?" Steve doesn't know what to say. Yes? Still, letting Billy go home looks risky, at the moment… but it's not like they can force him to stay there. Furthermore, he needs to go home too. Even if his house is obviously empty.
"Uhm, ok… I can give you guys a lift." Billy looks at him just for a moment, his expression serious and unreadable. "Ok. Let's go then." it is strange, not to hear any snide comment from him.
I guess he's too tired for being an asshole. Thinks Steve, with an internal shrug.
The return trip in the car is silent. Billy looks outside the window, without saying any word. In the end, he slams the door and storms out to the entrance of his home without saying anything.
"You're welcome, asshole!" Steve exclaims, but it's not that he was expecting anything else. "Thanks for everything, Steve." says Max, with a little smile. "Yeah. Let's keep in touch. Tell me if he gives us some sign of possession or anything." Steve sighs. "Consider it done. Thanks again." after that, Max follows her stepbrother, who's standing right next to the door, his arms crossed. They share just a last glance, before Steve starts the engine of his Beemer and drive away through the alleyway.

There is something about the odd behavior of Hargrove that Steve cannot stop thinking about. Like the way he had looked when Steve has come to the bathroom, checking on him. His puffy, red eyes… he was certainly crying. Thinking of a crying Billy Hargrove is something that he cannot figure. It makes Billy look more normal, more human. But, after all, what does he know about Hargrove? Their relationship has always been on the foot of war, from the very

first time they have seen each other.
Billy has always seemed nothing more than a gigantic douchebag to Steve, even before that infamous night when the Californian boy has beat the shit out of him. Thinking of him capable of emotions other than anger is strange. Steve cannot avoid thinking that he may have been a little too harsh with him. Billy has been possessed, then he had wake up in a stranger house, without any memory of his previous days and surrounded by people that he doesn't even like. Provided that Billy is capable to actually like someone. Robin told him to stop giving the boy so much shit. Maybe she was right. Maybe he has been a bit of an asshole, after all.

Steve scoffs at the thought. Him? Asshole? Billy had fucking ruined his face. He has given him a concussion. There's nothing to feel guilty about. He had deserved a little mocking treatment; it wasn't a big deal.

He takes another sip of his beer, pensive. He's sitting on the porch, looking straight to the dark forest in front of him, willingly avoiding his pool, like usual. He doesn't like to interact with his pool in any way, not after what happened with Barbara Holland.
Hargrove… there has been a moment, when he was in the tub, after being roughly undressed by Steve, without his consent. He has turned his face shyly towards the wall, in a weak attempt to avoid eye contact with Steve, with his body completely exposed. Steve had felt… had felt something. A rush of adrenaline, dominance. A sleeping power from his golden days, where he was basically an asshole just like Billy itself. Something near… arousal.

Steve shivers. That's not the kind of thought that he should have, especially not on a fucking guy, especially not Hargrove, above all. He swallows, trying to distract his mind from that image, of that sensation.
He decides to go back to the house and put a movie on, in the desperate attempt to leave the picture of the powerless, naked body of that asshole behind his sick mind.

"We're back!" Max cannot avoid sounding a little nervous. She knows how Neil is going to react to her stepbrother's absence. Despite her making up a lame excuse for him, the man is sure going to kick his

ass.
The TV is on, Neil and Susan are watching a boring baseball game. Susan gets up and smile at them cheerfully. "Welcome back, guys. Billy, how are you feeling? Max told us that you were involved in the Starcourt accident. That's really scary! The newspaper doesn't stop to write about that."

Billy swallows, uneasy, and rubs the back of his neck. He can feel how fuck up his hair is, like a bird's nest. It's not that he had given so much attention to that, previously. "Yeah, Susan… it was dreadful. But I'm ok. I guess I was lucky, after all." Lucky. What a foreign word for his messed up life.
Finally, Neil stands and looks at him. His looks anticipate nothing but trouble. It's clear that he doesn't believe a single word of what Billy is saying, but even If it was the truth, his father wouldn't believe him anyway. Because it's always like that, no matter what he does or what he says, he's always wrong, with no way out.

"I'm glad you're both ok." says Susan, with a lil smile. Neil, after what seems an eternity, speaks with a flat voice. "Maxine, Susan, if you don't mind, I have to speak privately to my son." Billy swallows again. Everybody knows what that means. He starts to feel the fear that is rising, but still, it's not that is something new or unexpected. However, it is impossible to get used to it.
"Let's go to your room." Neil commands, and Billy obeys without objections. He closes the door and Billy feels trapped, trapped in his own space. He has always felt like that in that house, much more similar to a cage.
"Don't expect me to believe that bullshit." spats Neil, approaching his son, whose back is colliding with the wall, cornered and helpless. "Dad, I…" Billy mumbles, and he can already feel the tears that are coming, even if his father hasn't touched him yet. "You've been out for days. Without saying anything to anyone, and you reappear here like this. I called your manager, nobody knew where you were hiding. And then, Maxine makes up some shitty story to cover you up."

I was possessed by an interdimensional monster that apparently made me a killer and then I was knocked out in a stranger's house for days. Sure, it sounds pretty impressive to put up. Billy doesn't want to put an effort

to create a valid alibi for his absence, he knows that it's completely useless. He knows how is gonna end, anyway.
He just stays silent, facing his father, trying not to cry like the little pussy he is, waiting for his old man to burst.

"I know you. I know what you are." the man continues, this time he has grabbed Billy's collar. There is a dense pause of silence. Neil scans his son, the Ramones t-shirt and the blue sweatpants. "Who's clothes are these?" he breathes, and it's clear how is holding back his rage.
"A friend. It's not what you're thinking." Billy's voice is trembling and broken. This time he is really innocent. He hasn't been… like himself since they got there in bumfuck, Indiana. He knew he couldn't afford to be a fucking queer in that place. He knew that and he was just waiting to finish high school to escape back home and leave his shitty dad and his shitty family back, once for all.
"You know, I work hard for this family. This an honest place, with good people. People that still have some values." yeah yeah. 'the work hard' speech. Billy receives it like twice a week. Neil sighs. He speaks again and he almost sounds softer. "You know what? It's my fault. My fault if you came out this way. I allowed you to spend too much time with that whore of your mother, and she made you a fucking fag, with her absurd hippy ideas."

Something snaps in Billy. He can be insulted, he can bear being called a fag, but he can't stand when Neil speaks about his mother. He pushes his father, breathing angrily from his nostrils, his eyes are wide, his pupils dilated. It's not a strong shove, but it's enough to take Neil by surprise. He didn't expect his son to react. He never reacts.
There is no warning, no signs, and suddenly Neil is on him. He's punching his face, hard. Neil hasn't been this furious since the night he had discovered his son sucking another guy's cock in the backseat of his car.

He hits Billy face like he wants to destroy it, like it's the most horrible thing in the world. Billy cries and makes a weak protest, begs his dad to stop with high pitched voice, sounding frail and pathetic.
"You're just a worthless piece of shit!" Billy is on the ground,

protecting himself with his arms on his head, and Neil is now kicking his ribs, making him cry even harder.
Neil stops, probably tired and in need of air.
"From now on, you're going to work, study, and get your sister around and nothing else. You hear me? No party, no drinking, and most of all, no getting bent like the cheap whore you are. I raised you like a responsible, respectful young man, it's time for you to prove you're worth something. Did I made myself clear?!"
Neil lowers himself until he's breathing right in front of Billy, still on the ground. Billy is a sobbing mess, but manages to nod. "Yes…" "I'm sorry I didn't catch that." "Yes… sir."

Neil pats his son's cheek and, after a final, long glare, he leaves Billy alone, still crying aloud on the floor, his rib cage aching and his face covered in blood.

3. Daddy issues

Now that Steve is jobless, even if not for his fault, his life looks even more boring and miserable. It has been four days from that infamous Starcourt accident, from Hopper's death, and he's already drowning in a sense of loss and failure. He really needs a hobby, a hobby maybe different from driving around thirteen years old kids.

He thinks that while Dustin enters his car, with a huge backpack full of who knows what on his knees.
"We need to talk about the Billy Hargrove question." announces the kid, resolute. "Hello you too, Henderson. Lovely day, isn't it?" "There's no time for this bullshit, Steve. I've been thinking about it all night, and-" "You've been thinking about Billy Hargrove all night long? Dudes, that sounds-" "AND" Dustin interrupts him, visibly pissed, "I think we should elaborate a strategy to test him again."

Steve sighs and starts to drive towards an unknown destination. "Test him? We've already decided that he's not flayed anymore. Why are you so obsessed with that douchebag?" Steve really wishes he was not the only one. Truth is, it has been a rough night for him too, even if he can't properly understand why he has been thinking about that jerk at all.
"BECAUSE, Steven, you saw that too, at the mall." "I… I don't know what I saw, Dustin. It was pretty fucked up. The whole situation." "Hargrove… he told the Mind Flayer to back off, and that thing obeyed him. Do you think it was a mere coincidence? Seriously?"
Steve rolls his eyes. "I don't know. Are you suggesting that Hargrove has some sort of Mind Flayer power?" "Exactly!" the boy scoffs, amused. "Henderson, that's fuckin ridiculous. You know that?" "Oh yeah? Ridiculous as much as a kid who has telekinetic power and can throw a car with her mind?" "That's… different." Steve makes a pause, trying to find the point. "El… she was a freaky experiment, damn!" "But what if Hargrove has, somehow, inherited some of the Flayer's ability?"

Dustin looks damn sure about his theory. Steve swallows and keeps his eyes glued on the road ahead of him, pensive. Billy Hargrove with Mind Flayer's power? That's fucking insane. And scary as hell too.

What if Dustin's right? Sure a power like that is way too dangerous on a guy like him.
"You seen him? At the mall. His nose was bleeding, Steven. Bleeding." Dustin continues, sounding serious and concerned. Steve scoffs. "No, Dustin, I haven't fucking seen his nose bleeding. I was more concerned about the gigantic monster who was going to kill us all." "We need to find out." the kid insists, looking straight to Steve who's still watching the road.
Another pause of silence passes by.

"So…" Steve starts, unsure. "What do you suggest?"
Dustin doesn't hold back his enthusiasm, grinning satisfied with his toothless smile. "Yes! I knew it! I knew you would have listened to me. The others think I'm paranoid." "I wonder why." spats the older boy, completely ignored by Dustin who is starting to search for stuff in his backpack.
"I suggest we proceeded with an incognito mission. We need to collect information and then attack in the right moment." "I don't wanna attack!" protests Steve, high pitched voice. "Last time he kicked my ass, remember? The guy's crazy, a full A psycho!" Dustin rolls his eyes, exasperated by Steve's apparent stupidity. "We won't attack *attack* him, dumbass, it's a figure of speech! I know you can't stand a fight with him." Steve blushes in anger and embarrassment. "That's not true! He just took me by surprise that night, that's all. In another circumstance I would have beat the shit out of him. I can assure you." "Right." Dustin sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose. "Would you just shut up and listen to me?" "Oh… ehm, ok. Go on, buddy."

Dustin pulls out some papers full of annotations from his backpack. "My theory is that he still doesn't know about the power. Otherwise, he would have used it on you at the moment you were provoking him at the Byers." "I wasn't…" "BUT MAYBE, that's a good point for us. Because knowing the guy, he wouldn't use such a power for people's sake." "Pretty much no." "So, I suggest we use a bait on him. My theory is that his powers show up only when he's in real danger. Like, threatened or something."
Steve snorts. He can't really imagine Billy Hargrove threatened in any way. "So you want to threat him? Man, that's not gonna work." Dustin sighs again. "This is where we need to disguise ourselves." he

pulls out something else from his pack, and this time Steve can't avoid laughing. There's a costume on Dustin's lap, something that resembles the serial killer from Halloween, with the same mask.

"Dude…" this time is Steve that is sighing. "That's like, the stupidest thing I ever heard." The idea of trying to scare shitless Billy with a cheap horror costume is beyond idiotic.
"FINE!" Dustin makes a large gesture with his arms, tired. "What do you suggest, Sherlock?" "Just… let's watch him for a while. We'll find something to do eventually." "That's a shitty plan." "That's a fair plan, Einstein. A one that prevents us to be kicked by the Hawkins resident asshole."
This time, looks like Dustin has nothing to say about it. They were really going to spy on Billy Hargrove to find out if he has crazy Mind Flayer superpowers. Steve Harrington really needs a hobby.

They spent two hours looking with a binocular at the douchebag while he was working at the pool and, useless to say, they found out nothing strange about the guy. Besides the fact that he was wearing a shirt, a black flower fantasy Hawaiian one, and he looked less in the mood of flirting with housewives, Billy Hargrove seemed kinda normal. Even lame, without his usual spark of danger.

Outside in the Hawkins pool parking lot, Steve feels really like he had just wasted a summer afternoon of his life with an idiotic plan.
"He's the usual, annoying, insufferable jerk. Case closed, Sherlock." speaks Steve, leaning with his back on the Beemer, arms crossed. Dustin is not convinced. "We can't give up now, Steve! The city is in danger. We need to do something!" Steve raises an eyebrow. "Don't you have better things to do? Like, I don't know, homework?" "Don't you?" Ouch. Touché. He's also unemployed and that burns.
The brunette sighs. "I don't know, man… that was just stupid." "It wasn't! You can't give up now, Stevie!"
Steve is about to argue, but a sudden known voice interrupts them, provoking a chill in their bodies.
"The fuck are you doing here?"

Billy should be glad that he has not being fired. Truth is, after the beating he had received from Neil the previous night, he couldn't

care less. Besides, after Heather's loss, they're out of personal in Hawkins community pool. This is why they had kept him besides his absence.
He has spent the first day of work after the recent mess like a ghost, his presence silent and discrete, despite how he used to be before. He's still aching, both from the beating he has received and from the disappearance of the Mind Flayer from his body. This morning he has puked again that weird gross black mass.
His mind feels dizzy, distant, like he's under some sort of drug. Maybe it is still the side effect of being possessed by that damn monster.

Nobody dares to comment on his fresh bruises at work, and he manages to keep his sunglasses and his shirt on all day, trying to hide them the best as he can. He knows that is impossible not to notice them, but still, he is kind of relieved that nobody has said a word about it, not even his manager.
He's also relieved that the day is finally finished. He just wants to go home and lock himself in his room, playing some Metallica records and bury his head in the pillow. Maybe something more depressing than Metallica… but he's not used to that kind of mood. He doesn't even have depressing music. He's not the type to be depressed at all.

What he's not expecting is to find out Steve The Hair Harrington and one of the brats outside the pool in the parking lot, arguing loudly about something. He hasn't seen them at the pool that day, so there is no reason for them to be here. Maybe they're stalking him?
He really doesn't have any desire to deal with that now. So, his voice comes out less poisonous than he wants.

"The fuck are you doing here?"

Harrington and Henderson stare at each other, in search of a lame excuse to put up. Then, after a few seconds, Steve manages to make a small, nervous laugh. "Nothing. We were just hanging out. This town is small, not everything orbits around you, Hargrove."
Billy grunts and approaches Steve, glaring at him with pure hate. However, his right eye is swollen and bruised, he's tired and depressed and his look can't be as intimidating as he wishes.

"Get the fuck out of here." he spats, dangerously grabbing

Harrington's collar. Steve doesn't look touched or scared at all. He's staring at him. No, he is staring at his right eye, at the horrible purple shades around it.

"Holy shit…" he whispers, shocked. "What happened to your face?" his voice is soft, curious almost. Billy feels naked again under those big doe eyes, scanning him.
"None of your business, princess."
They're close, really close. Billy can feel Harrington's fancy cologne from here, it pinches through his nostrils.
"You were back from yesterday evening and you managed to get in a fight in such a short time?" Steve asks, incredulous. Billy snorts. God, Harrington is really an idiot. How could he be King Steve in the past? He's just a gigantic, catastrophic, grade A dork…

"Holy shit!" Steve repeats, and looks like he had a sudden enlightenment. "Your father did this! This is why Max didn't want you to go back. You get beaten at home!"
Billy can't help it. The fear. The exposure. He widens his eyes and his entire body is crossed by a long, dramatic chill. Above everyone, Steve fucking Harrington has just discovered one of his embarrassing secrets. Yes, he gets beaten. His dad is a fucking psycho, his family is poor and fucked up. He is, fucked up.
Billy tightens the grip on Steve's collar and clenches his jaw. He stares for one, deep moment into the other boy's eyes. Then, he spats with all his rage.

"Fuck you, Harrington."

It's a sudden movement, his head collides with Harrington's with a loud thump. The boy groans and dashes to the ground, keeping a hand on the aching part.
"Holy shit! That fuckin hurts!" he complains, and Dustin is rushing on him, all worried for his beloved hero.
"Steve! Shit, are you ok?!"
Billy has nothing else to say to them. He's already giving them his back while he's walking away. Dustin manages to yell at him.
"You're so full of shit, Hargrove! Why the fuck did you do that?!"
But Billy just ignores him and gives him the middle finger, before he gets back in the building through the service door.

The Casa Harrington's door opens, and when Robin sees Steve busy with an icy coke pressed on his forehead, her first reaction is to laugh. It is just comical; she can't help it. Then she clears her voice, a feel of pity at the sight of the poor Steve's puppy eyes.

"What happened?" she asks, smiling slightly. Steve sighs. "Gotta head-butted." he closes the door behind his friend and guides her to the kitchen, looking for some beer.
Robin laughs again, apparently Steve being beaten is something funny. He glares at her, hands on his hips like an annoyed grandma. "Sorry, sorry." she says. "It's just… you're not even healed from the previous beating by the evil Russians and you have been kicked again. That's hilarious." "Yeah, hilarious. Har har." Steve rolls his eyes and approaches the fridge.
Robin sits on the counter.

"So, whose feet had you stomped this time?"
Steve throws a can that she promptly catches while he cracks open a cold one.
"Hargrove."

She makes a surprised sound. "What? That guy again? How?" Steve sighs and looks outside the window. It's late afternoon and the sun is now gone.
The truth is, he feels really stupid about Hargrove, about all the story. Way too stupid.
"Dustin believes that he has some sort of superpower." Steve admits after a while, taking a small sip from his beer. Robin laughs again and almost spits hers. "Hargrove? Superpower? Like what, like superman or…?" "More like Mind Flayer power. It's just a stupid theory and…" his voice trails off at the sight of the perplexed expression on his friend's face. He can read her saying 'Seriously, Harrington?'

"I know, I know!" he exclaims after a while, sounding almost anxious. "But Dustin… well, he insisted! So we decided to check on him." "What? Like, spying?!" "Kind of… we went to the pool, trying to figure if there was something odd with him." "So you stalked Billy Hargrove?"
Steve flushes. Robin has always the power to make him feel even more stupid than the usual.

"I didn't…. I didn't STALK Billy Hargrove… that sounds totally wrong and pervert." "You're the one that is obsessing with the guy, you tell me Stevie!"

Steve snorts. He isn't obsessing with the guy. That's totally stupid, ridiculous and fucked up in many ways. He just wants to know if Hargrove could be a threat to the town. That's all. Plus, it was Dustin that had make up all that story in the first place!
"So, how come you ended up being beaten by him?" asks then Robin, taking another sip of her beer. Steve sighs again. That was embarrassing. The most awkward part of that already awkward story.
"He found us, me and Dustin, in the parking lot. I don't know, he looked kinda weird… like… less himself. He approached me and I've noticed that he was all battered. And it was kinda strange because how could he have ended up in a fight in so little time?"
Robin looks pensive, concentrate. "He gets beaten at home." "Exactly!" Steve is genuinely happy that his friend has got the same idea. "So… I may have told him that. I was just surprised, that's all, I couldn't help myself!" she scoffs. "You told him that you know that he gets beaten at home? Woa, dingus, that's kinda low, even for you."
Steve groans. "Are you defending him?! He fucking head-butted me! I'm the hurt one!" Robin rolls her eyes. -"hat guy in a week has been possessed, transformed into the puppy of a monster, knocked out for 48 hours, and physically and psychologically exposed to you, a person that he hates." Steve gulps. Robin is making him feel sorry for the guy, and that's ridiculous. "I don't even know why he hates me so much." he spats after a while. Robin smirks. "I have few theories about it, but that doesn't matter." "Now I feel bad for him… I should have minded my own business." Steve sounds sad and Robin can't avoid chuckling.
"It's not your fault if he has daddy issues, Stevie. You don't have to feel bad about it. Besides, we're talking about the dude that literally broke your face last year, aren't we? The fact that you're empathizing with him proves that you're a fucking bleeding heart."

Steve pushes slightly his friend, giggling. "Dude, screw you!"
.
"So" she starts after some time "What are you going to do about it?" "What do you think I should do?" "Seriously? Give it up. Forget about it. Hargrove is a psycho. I used to think he was a banal, Californian

asshole, but then yesterday I thought that he's more than what he looks like. I think he's actually really, really rotten. In a more deep way."
Steve stares at her and blinks, wordless. "Dude, how can you catch this much about people just seeing them a few times?" "I don't. I'm talking about suppositions. I suppose Hargrove is really, really messed up. You should avoid him and go on with your life. He doesn't even deserve your concern."
The boy tightens his grip on the beer. "I know." he says, almost a whisper. Robin is looking at him, serious.

"Steve, you think always so low of yourself. Hargrove sure needs a friend at this moment, even if I doubt that he's able to accept friendship from anyone. But you don't need a person like him in your life."
Steve swallows and closes his eyes, breathing slowly.
"You're right."
"Of course I am!"
He looks again outside the window. "You're right." he repeats, absently.

He manages to resist the urge to reach Hargrove for less than 24 hours. He's outside the Hawkins Pool, in the parking lot, talking to himself like a crazy person. He's nervous, so much nervous. His hands are sweating and shaking, and he doesn't know why. For the fear of being beaten again by the guy? Or is it something else?
He can't avoid thinking that he strangely feels like when he was going to apologize to Nancy, in the attempt to have her back. The stupid comparison makes his stomach flutter.
What will he say to the dude? Sorry, I've been nosy? I'm sorry that your dad beats you up?
That's fucking stupid.

He sighs.
That situation is all fucking stupid.
He should go back to his house, forget everything. But there's something that is keeping him anchored here. He knows that, trying to talk again with Hargrove is the stupidest idea, but he can't go back now.

Time passes. An entire hour, and there's no trace of the guy, so that's odd.
Another crazy idea strikes Steve's head. What if Billy has a concussion? What if he fell? What if he's in some sort of trouble?
He opens the car door and walks towards the entrance of the pool, even if he doesn't know what he's really doing. Hargrove would be probably busy fucking one of his coworkers in the locker room. He grimaces. He really needs to stop thinking of Hargrove in that kind of situation, that's sick.

The entrance door of the pool is open. The light inside is suffused. Steve goes ahead towards the locker room. He can hear the streaming sound of the shower, so Billy must be under the shower. Still, something seems off.

While he goes on, another sound becomes much clearer. A sob. Another one. It's Billy, it's Billy and he's crying, crying under the shower. Steve thinks about Billy's eyes at the Byer's home, puffy and red, sore from crying. Something feels oppressive in his throat, a sense of nervous anxiety, an impossible apprehension.

He rushes towards the shower, and the sight in front of him makes him exhale a shocked breath. Billy is sat on the cold wet ground, embracing himself under the icy stream of the shower. He's soaking wet and shivering.

4. Things I don't need

It looks like his entire life is trying to fuck him up. It wasn't enough to be beaten and humiliated by Neil, no. Harrington must be the one that needed to expose him, to tell aloud his secret. Harrington, above all the people.

Billy feels that he has lost everything. His image, his credibility, his strength. He can't afford to feel like this. He can't afford to be like this, a depressed wreck that just wants to jump from the quarry and say fuck off to the entire world. He is a fighter, he needs to be a fighter. For him, life has always been a ring where you have to struggle to survive. It has always been like this. Eat or be eaten.

So, this feeling of guilt, sadness and loneliness is something foreign for him, and he hates that. He used to be angry, he used to react at all the shit that life has given him.
That day, like the previous one, his coworkers have left him alone. Everybody can sense that he's not ok, not only by looking at his bruised eyes covered with his sunglasses; his body language too, the oddness of his behavior… everything in him is desperately screaming to leave him alone, ignore and let it be.
And, luckily, no one dares to ask him if he has any problem that he wants to share. People are scared of him. But that's good, that's exactly what Billy wants.
That day had been ridiculously long and tiring, but, finally, Billy can shower and go home, lock himself up and isolate from his fucked up family and the rest of the world. He still has a vague sense of nausea that pinches his stomach and he really doesn't want to throw up again. It looks like a continuous reminder of what he had become and what he had done.

His body has recovered, but he's still weak and exhausted. Sure he's not really able to save anyone from drowning, in his current state. It's like the disappearance of the Mind Flyer has literally sucked off all his stamina, both physically and mentally. At least, he can move and do stuff without aching pain, he doesn't need someone else to shamefully take off his pants anymore.
Being there, working at the pool as nothing has ever happened, is

something that requires a lot of mental energy too. Heather Holloway is dead, and it's just his fault.
Billy can feel the anxiety rising while he enters the cubicle of the shower, still dressed. He's not really focusing on what he's doing, he feels detached from his body, immersed in his distressful state of mind.

This is where everything started, where Heather approached him, worried, and he had abducted her. Her only fault was to be nice enough to check upon him.
The water starts falling, it's cold.
He remembers the previous week through flashes. He remembers taking a lot of icy cold showers, feeling the soothing sensation of the chill on his burning skin. Everything looked brighter, louder, stronger, and painful.
Then, he had started to stop fightin it. The monster that was inside him. He had stopped resisting it, he had stopped to try to have again the control of his limbs, of his body, of his brain. His memory starts to fade after it. There are other flashes, he remembers the sauna, he remembers the suffocating pain that he had felt, trapped with the hot vapor, boiling through his skin. He remembers a voice, a little girl asking him to see, see what happened. He remembers let her, show her his true self.
And then, everything goes black until his awakening at the Mall.

For some strange reason, Billy can't move under the icy stream of the shower. It's cold and he's freezing, but he thinks that it's just, he deserves to feel like this. It's fair to feel cold. It's fair to feel trapped.

Heather was a good person. She was pretty, she was nice, everybody loved her. She was much better than him, so why she's dead and he's not? Why she's gone and he's still there, stupidly working at the Hawkins Community Pool?
Goddamit, she even did find his job! It was her idea, to ask her manager if he could use another lifeguard. She had proposed the job to him while they were having a lame conversation at a pathetic Tommy H's party. Billy has never thanked her enough. She had a crush on him, and he didn't give a shit about her, like exactly all the other women in Hawkins and in his life.

Billy sits on the ground and grabs his hair, finally letting himself cry.

There's nobody there, nobody can hear his pathetic outbreak.
Was really the Mind Flayer what had made him a monster? He is a horrible person, and nobody gives a damn shit about him. He could slice his wrists open with a razor blade and get over it right now, in the Hawkins Community Pool's showers, and nobody would care. But it's his fault. He deserves that.
He is that monster, he creates that monster.

His mind instinctively goes to his mother, to Maxine, to that little kid with freaky mind power, even to, stupidly, that dork Steve Harrington with his impossible protective momma instincts. Those people cared about him. Those people helped him, even when he didn't deserve that. God, he even head-butted Harrington the day before! After all that he did for him, even without any good reason.

Billy cries harder, feeling small and pathetic, the most pathetic creature in the universe. A pussy. A weak, fairy boy.

He had always treated Harrington like shit, just because he was jealous. Fuckin jealous. Everybody told him that Steve was a loser, that he had lost his crown even without trying to fight for it, but the truth is that Harrington really does not give a shit. He has the balls to be himself, while Billy can only bark all day to impress other people, acting cocky and making a host of flatterers that don't know anything about his real self.
Yeah, if only they knew… if only they knew who he really is.

Billy embraces himself. Then, something captures his attention. Looks like he's definitely gone nuts, because his sense of dread has started to produce hallucinations.
There is Steve Harrington in front of him. He has a soft, concerned expression. He wears a stupid preppy polo shirt and, if Billy wasn't too busy in being a sobbing mess, he would make a snarky comment on it.

He looks real. He looks beautiful.

"Hargrove… what the hell…" Steve can't believe in what he's seeing. Billy doesn't even look like himself.

He’s having a panic attack. Steve thinks, and it’s nothing new for him, not after the arrival of the creatures of the upside-down in his life. He puts a hand under the stream, then he curses between his teeth.
"Goddammit, that’s fucking freezing!" Steve stops the water, questioning himself if the temperature of it can be a bad sign of Billy being flayed again. The blonde hasn’t stopped sobbing, ignoring completely the sudden lack of water or the presence of Steve in the scene.

Steve gets on his knees in front of him, cautious. Billy looks at him, and he looks small, frail. It is something so strange to think about Billy Hargrove.
"Billy, can you hear me?" Steve tries, uncertain. The boy’s name sounds so strange on his lips. They have never been on first name basis.
Billy stares right in his eyes, and he’s whispering something that Steve can’t hear. So he makes another uncertain attempt. "Billy… you’re ok. He’s not here anymore. You got rid of it." "It’s not my fault." finally, Steve catches the other boy’s voice, even if it is muffled and weak. "I know, I know… listen, we should get out." Steve is approaching him, slowly. Billy is looking at Steve but it’s like he doesn’t acknowledge him.

"It’s not my fault. I swear he made me do it. I tried, I tried to resist. I swear I did." Billy’s voice is more clear now, but still broken. Steve nods and stares back into the other’s eyes, and the gaze of the boy is so intense that he can’t avoid shivering. At this distance, it’s like he’s noticing Billy’s eyes for the first time. They’re blue, deep blue, like the ocean he misses so much.
Steve gulps. Billy has freckles, and long eyelashes. Cute. Almost girly.
He internally shakes his head. What the fuck?! Why is he having again those kinds of sick thoughts in a moment like that?! That’s fucking no sense and way too weird.

"It’s ok. You’re ok now. Can I touch you?" he tentatively reaches a hand. Billy broke the eye contact and nod. He embraces himself tightly.

"Please do." he whispers. And. Holy. Shit.

Steve doesn't know what his panic does mean, but he squeezes the other boy's shoulder, mild, cautious.
Please do. Please do.
The words echo in his mind. The point of contact under his hand is burning, while the boy in front of him is shivering so bad.

"Let's get you out of here." Steve repeats, flat voice. Billy looks at him again. "Are you even real?" he asks. Steve laughs nervously. "Yeah it's me, pretty boy or whatever shit you call me." the blonde snorts, looking almost amused. It's a good sign, Steve thinks, relieved.
"Of course it's you. You're my guardian angel or something."
"I don't think you need one."
"No, I don't. I'm not a fucking charity case." There's venom in Billy's voice, and for a moment Steve is worried to assist to another violent outburst. Talking to Billy is like being in equilibrium on a rope, one moment he's kind of normal and sarcastic and the other he's ready to explode.
But Steve is starting to dangerously think that there's almost a nervous excitement in it. He talks calmly. Like always. He always pretends to be calm with Billy. "Never said you were."

They stare at each other for a while, Billy doesn't move but doesn't break the eye contact either. "Sorry I head-butted you." Steve snorts. That's new. "Fine… I guess? You did worse to me." Billy nods, serious. "I know. I'm sorry for that too. I went too far. I was angry. But not at you. You just gave me a fight and that was all I was looking for."
A fight… Steve asks himself if maybe Billy's dad was involved somehow. He decides that he doesn't really want to know. It's all in the past, after all. He's used to forgive and forget.

"Well, not that I don't appreciate the effort, but that's ok, I guess. Old story." he rubs the back of his neck, almost embarrassed. God, that is a really a strange conversation in a stranger situation.

Billy scoffs and finally gets on his feet. "King Steve, the merciful." he surpasses the other boy with a little shove and walks towards the locker, a strange calm beside the circumstance. At least he looks like his old-self. "Why are you here, by the way?" he's now giving his back to Steve, who's watching him quite surprised. Billy takes off his shirt and throws it in a duffel bag on a bench. His back is tanned, smooth

and muscular, but full of ugly purple bruises.
Steve blinks. He's staring. He needs to stop, what the actual fuck.

"I wanted to check on you. I'm sorry… about yesterday. I've been nosy. I should have minded my own business."
Billy sprays some deodorant and put another shirt on, still turned to the opposite side of Steve. "So you decided to make amend by being nosy some more?" Billy asks, but his voice is not venomous, he's actually sarcastic. Steve can deal with that. He rubs his neck again, thinking of something clever to say. It's not that he has any excuses for his acting like a creeper. God, he wishes he knew too why he's doing what the fuck he's actually doing. Maybe he's bored? He needs something to do?

"Yeah, well, I was parked outside, you didn't come out…" Billy turns and faces him, he's smirking. "Aww, worried about me, King Steve?" well, at least Steve can say that he's feeling better, if he has the energy to be his old self asshole. He approaches him and stares right into his eyes, it's a challenge, and Steve starts to feel that odd sensation of nervousness again, the one that makes his hands sweat.
"Yeah… I mean, maybe? I don't know, man. Is it bad?"
There's a pause of silence, ridiculously long. Then, Billy bursts into laugher. It sounds like a genuine laugh, similar to Robin's reactions at his usual dorkiness.
"You're a fucking bleeding heart." he spats in the end, poking Steve's chest with two fingers.
"You're not the first person to tell me. Dunno, man. I can't help it."

Billy collects his stuff in his bag and starts to walk quickly towards the exit, followed by the other boy. Outside, he closes the door of the pool with a strange pensive frown on his expression.
"People like you get always eaten in the end." he states, heavily. Steve can't help to think that he's right, after all. But he doesn't care. He shrugs, with a lil playful smile. "Yeah, but what can I do? It's my nature, I can't change it." "Don't." Billy almost interrupts him. He's looking at him all serious. "No need to change it. But you need to protect yourself. From people like me."

Damn, Billy doesn't stop to surprise Steve. Before he finds the guy sobbing under the icy cold water of the shower, and now he's in a philosophical mood, giving him… life advice? Strange becomes

stranger.

Steve shrugs again. "Don't worry, sweetheart. I have a nailed bat for that." "No shit, I remember Max with that thing almost castrate me." Billy snorts and playfully pushes him. Playfully. How is that even possible? How they ended up like this, sharing jokes like old best buddies?
Billy looks at him, smiling. It's a real smile. Is like he's studying his features, like a rare animal. Steve feels boiling under that gaze. Then, the boy simply gives his back and sighs.
"Gotta go, Harrington." "Where are you going?" Steve finds himself stupidly ask. "Where the fuck should I go, princess? Home." "Oh." Steve hesitates, uneasy. "Will you be… ok?"
Stupor passes in Billy's eyes, but just for a moment. Steve wonders what the other guy is thinking. Will he think that he's an idiot? That he's a nosy, sad, stalker? Steve isn't sure if he's thinking the same about himself.
But Billy smiles again and rolls his eyes. He looks pure, with that spark in his look, almost younger. "You're really a dork, King Steve." he turns and pokes again his chest, and after a last, malicious glare, he walks towards a fancy, sportive bicycle tied against the perimetral fence of the pool. Steve stares at him, thinking about the odd choice of words of the boy. It is impossible not to think about Nancy again.

You're an idiot, Steve Harrington.

He snaps from his thoughts, and stupidly asks a nosy question again.
"What about that bike?!" Billy scoffs, annoyed. "What about it? I'm out of car, dumbass. The Camaro will probably need weeks to be back." "Looks really expensive." Steve comments, with a smirk. The other boy pats the saddle. "Sweet, isn't it? It has gears and all the shits. I stole it from a sucker science professor that lives a few blocks from my place."

Steve grins and shakes his head. "You're the worst, Hargrove. You can't steal bikes in a small place like this. Everybody will know that." Billy throws his arms. "Relaax, princess! I've changed the color to disguise it."
The brunette makes a step ahead. "What about your folks? Don't they recognize that there's a stolen bike in their yard?" the other boy snorts, mounting on his electric blue vehicle. "Do I look fucking

stupid, Harrington?! I'm not parking this thing in my yard. Neil thinks I'm walking or something, much more probably he doesn't give a shit." "Walking? Under the sun?!" Billy shrugs. This is really starting to look like a third grade. Steve gulps and awkwardly put his hands in his pockets. "Do you need rides?" at this stupid question, Billy actually groans, exasperated. "Not. A. Charity. Case. Harrington." he sniffles and looks at Steve like a hawk, slightly tilting his head. "And not one of your fuckin kids."

Steve shrugs and grins. "Sure you act like one." "Har har, I'm hurt. We're finished here? I'm tired to see your face." the brunette does a step aside, leaving the road clear. "I believe my face was pretty." he spats, sarcastic. Billy grins.
"Don't flatter yourself. You're just not the worst. See ya around, princess."
Steve blinks and hesitated, impaled in his spot like an idiot, not sure what to do.
"Yeah… see you around, Hargrove!" he manages to say after a while, and he's sure that he can hear Billy's derisive laugh.

He drives fast towards home, clenching the steering wheel, a sense of anxiety and excitement in his chest. His last half an hour with Billy Hargrove has been absurd and way too odd. Still, he can't avoid feeling a sensation of victory on the boy, like he has seen him for real, without his skin.

He laughed, he smiled, I made him do that. He thinks, biting his lip, hiding a smirk.

Robin's words are echoing in his mind.

Steve, you think always so low of yourself. Hargrove sure needs a friend in this moment, even if I doubt that he's able to accept friendship from anyone. But you don't need a person like him in your life.

She's right. He knows she is. But still… she doesn't know him. Neither Steve, but he wants, to know him. There is something more in Billy Hargrove to discover besides his mask of rage, cockiness and toxic masculinity. He knows that, and he wants to find out. He's not aware of why the hell is he so much interested in the dude that has

beat the shit out of him less than a year before, but still, he can't help it.

Maybe he really needs a friend. Like a, guy friend. Of his age.

Is that so? He already has that kind of relationship with Robin. She's like, his female-dude friend. They share a lot of inside jokes about the girls they both like.

But you need to protect yourself. From people like me.

Billy has said that. But he can make his own choice, after all. He's not a child. He can do that. He can be his friend. He needs that. Will he let him?

Notes for the Chapter:

> Billy on a bike is pure comedy, but what about Billy on a stolen bike?
>
> BTS: The bike was Mr.Clark's. Dunno, he gives me the idea of being the kind of man that goes on biking in nature on Sunday lol

5. Under your spell

Summary for the Chapter:

> With the help of Robin, Steve understands something about his recent "strange thoughts".

Notes for the Chapter:

> Thanks <3
>
> Warning: some internalized homophobia. Steve is a dork, Robin is a wise owl.

The air is thick and dense with warm vapor. Steve feels his breath heavy, slowed down, relaxed. He's sitting next to a bathtub, there's a boy in it. His head rests on the edge of the tub, tilted back. His eyes are closed, his long lashes flicker slightly. The boy is slowly breathing through his nose, a small, freckled nose. Blonde curls are smeared on his forehead, on his cheekbone.

The arms of the boy are tanned and muscular, leaning loosely to the board of the tub. His smooth chest raises and falls slow, involving his belly in a languid movement. His nipples are small and dark, a gold pendant, a catholic saint trinket hangs from the boy's neck.
Steve is staring at him, again. He can't resist. He wants him, he wants to touch, to feel, to explore. His skin must be smooth and warm. He wants to know it.

So, he tentatively reaches a hand.
"Can I touch you?"
The boy opens his eyes, those blue, intense swells, so sweet, too sweet for being attached to him. The boy speaks in a whisper.
"Please do."

Steve wakes with a start, covered in sweat. He uses some seconds to focus on his room, his bed, his bedsheets. Then, he slowly, carefully lifts the blankets, discovering an evident bulge in his pijama pants.
He curses and falls back on the pillow, grabbing his hair.

"Fuck!"
He yells, there's nobody home who can hear him.
"Shit, shit, shit! Not that, not that!"
Above all the misfortune, starting to have wet dreams about Billy Hargrove is something that he would have never imagined.

"I need to get laid." Steve announces, biting nervously his pink popsicle.
"No shit, dingus." Robin responds with her usual sarcastic tone.

They're sitting on a bench, staring at the street outside the previous competitor of Scoop's Ahoy, Antonio's Gelati. It's a small, shabby place run by a guy who claims to be Italian.
They have spent another morning searching for a job, giving their bare CVs to every shop in the town. But the research doesn't look very promising.

"No, I mean. I really need to get laid." Steve insists, resolute. "Yeah, and as I said, no shit, dingus. What kind of enlightenment did you have to say this unspoken truth?"
Steve hesitates. He's going to share one of the most embarrassing secretes that he has ever had. But he had already shared every kind of spooky shit with Robin, including being kidnaped by Russian evil guards, so he supposes it's ok.

"I'm starting to have strange feelings, Robin. Really, really, freaking stuff." the girl burst into laughter. "Like what, Stevie?!" "Like…" he sighs. Yeah, he's going to do that. He's going to share it. "Like… strange feelings… about… a guy… a DUDE."

Robin freezes and looks at Steve with a pensive frown. Seconds of intense silence follow by, in which Steve can hear his own heart beating fast and furious. Then, the girl recollects herself.

"So, let me get this straight. You started to feel attracted by a guy and you think that's because you're not getting laid for a while?" Steve scoffs. "*Attracted*! Attracted is a big, stupid word Robin. No, I'm not attracted… geez… it's just… I may have had a dream. Like… yeah… like… a wet dream?!"

Robin blinks and freezes again. She's literally torturing Steve with her silence. Then, she burst into another laugh and the boy can feel his ears getting hot and flushed.
"Fuck you, Robin! You find it funny?!" she wipes a few tears from her eyes. "I find it hilarious, Steven. You're so stupid, you know that?!" "Oh yeah, why's that?!" she sighs, trying to breathe normally again. "Because you're absolutely naïve. You really think that the only reason for you, being sexually attracted by a dude, is that you're not fucking any girl?!"
As usual, Steve feels idiot, talking to Robin about those kinds of stuff. He shrugs. "Well… yeah. Is that this strange?" "You don't start to like guys because you're in abstinence, idiot. That's stupid and really homophobic. But you're a simpleton so I forgive you." Steve rolls his eyes. "I'm not homophobic." "Yes, you are. Otherwise you wouldn't be so upset about it."

This time, he goes silent. This point of view completely changes his theories about his crazy dream. Like, people dream all the kind of freaking stuff. It's normal, isn't it? If you dream about screwing someone doesn't mean you really want to do that. Everybody knows it. But still… it's not only the dream. The dream has been the cherry on top of it. It has been days that he has been hit by strange thoughts about the Californian jerk.

"I can see smoke coming out of your ears due to abnormally high mind working." Robin comments, glaring mockingly at her friend. Steve furiously bites his popsicle, freezing his teeth without caring. "Geez, gimme a second, won't you?! I'm trying to process, here. Very fucked up information." "To process what, Stevie?! That you want to badly bang Billy Hargrove?!"

Steve drops the ice cream and turns wide eyed to her. "What the fuck!" he almost yells, high pitched voice. "Oh, come oon! You think it's really that hard to figure it out?!"
So. She knows. She understood. How come she always understands everything?! Is she a psychic or something? Is she a crazy experiment like El?!

Steve grabs his hair, almost panicking. "Oh my god. Oh my god. I want to bang Billy Hargrove. That's fucked up. I hate him. He fucking hates me too!"

Robin raises an eyebrow. "You think so? You seemed kind of concerned at the Byers." "It's not only that." Steve sighs. "Yesterday I went to the pool, looking for him." "What?!" she interrupts him, incredulous. "You're kind of stalking him, you know that?!" "I know, I know. Would you let me finish or what?" "…Go on."

Steve makes a pause, collecting his thoughts. The day before has been… something strange. Something way too unexpected. He was somehow still processing it.

"So, I went to the pool, looking for Hargrove. I wanted to apologize, I've been nosy." "He literally hit you for that, but… yeah, whatever." "Yeah, whatever. So, I was waiting for him and he wasn't going out, so I got kind of worried, dunno why, so I entered the locker room, looking for him, and I've founded him under the shower." ok. That came out strange. Robin smirks lasciviously, while Steve is instantly regretting his choice of words. "Kinky." "No! not like that! He was all dressed, the water was icy, and he was literally freaking out. Dude, really, he looked like a clone of himself. He was crying like a baby, saying that it wasn't his fault, that he tried to stop him…"
Robin grimaces, pensive. "Maybe he needed some sweet Steve Harrington's love to cheer up." Steve reddens and punches her in the shoulder. "Would you shut up?! You… you…" but he doesn't know how to continue the sentence, so he just grunts, all flushed.

"So?" Robin urges him. "So… nothing. What was I supposed to do? I tried to help him, to soothe him. Then, we shared small talks, and… I don't know. He was kind of nice." Robin goes closer and stares at Steve, concentrated. It looks like she's solving a complex equation. Steve shivers under the gaze, and continues to talk nervously. "I mean, he was less asshole than usual. Almost, almost… enjoyable."

Ten seconds pass. Robin is continuing her scrutiny and Steve feels like he's melting. He has really started to sweat badly, and it's not for the weather.
Then, Robin snaps, as If she has finally found the resolution of her reasoning.

"You totally like him!" she states with excessive enthusiasm. Steve is hit by a harsh, sudden chill at the sound of those words. *Like* him. It's an important statement.

"Bullshit!" he spats, feeling the urge of running away from that conversation. "You do! Oh my god oh my god you totally do! You're so red, you're way too obvious Stevo!"
"That's it! Ight imma head out." Steve snaps on his feet, but Robin is grabbing the sleeve of his shorts, blocking his escape attempt. "You're not going anywhere, dingus. We need to figure out how to solve your problem." "We? Excuse me? There's no we here. And no solving, no solution. Nothing! It's just a stupid crush due to the recent inactivity of my dick." "Gross! But you had just admitted that is a crush!"

Steve blinks and gasps, feeling, again, incredibly stupid. "Fuck this!" he shoves away Robin's grip and makes a single step ahead, when the sudden arrival of a parking truck, driven by the subject of their discussion flanked by his red-head sister, literally freezes him.

"Speaking of devil…"

The smirk of Robin goes from an ear to another, while Steve is internally cursing aloud. Fuck his bad luck. Fuck his sweating hands. Fuck Robin and her sneery comments!
Billy jumps out of the truck (that must be Neil's, Steve supposes), yelling at his sister. "I'm telling you, Maxine, that I know these kinds of shit. I'm older than you and you should learn to show some respect." the girl slams the door and scoffs. "You may be older but you have the nut-brain of a child, Billy." "This insolence won't help you, shitbird." "Well, bite me! Oh, hey look, there's Steve and Robin!"

Before Steve can literally throw himself in the trash-bin in a desperate attempt to hide, Max points towards him. Billy's expression instantly transforms from pissed to interested. He grins wolfishly, while Robin is trying to cover he giggles with her hands.

I bet she's having a lot of fun right now. Thinks Steve internally dying for the absurdness of the situation.

"Hey guys!" he awkwardly waves a hand, while the siblings reach them, quickly walking through the park, Max with her trademark skateboard under her right arm.
"Well, well, well, if it's not King Steve in flesh." Billy stands in front of him, fingers hooked to the belt loop on his way too tight jeans. Then, he gives a small, disinterested nod to Robin, who's studying

him like a math book. "Buckley." he flatly adds. When did he learn Robin's surname? Has he done some research?

"What are you doing? Were you two arguing?" Steve asks, trying to sound bored, totally casual. Billy and Max look at themselves for a moment, then, they both laugh, as Steve has just said something nonsense. "Nope, nothing unusual. We're always arguing." Max briefly explains, with a shrug. Billy rolls his eyes. "That's because you're a pain in the ass, Maxine." "Hey! Don't talk to your sister like that!" Steve intervenes, causing the apparent hilarity in the other boy. "Oh! Momma Steve is getting upset, I think I made her angry." "We're out for some groceries. What are you doing here?" Max says, answering way too late Steve's previous question and ignoring her mocking brother.

Steve rubs his neck, slightly embarrassed. "Looking for a job…?" he speaks with a questioning tone, like he's not really sure what he's doing for real.
"Clearly you haven't found one." Billy spats, and Robin rolls her eyes, she's really holding back the urge to insult the guy. "You're an asshole, Billy." Max says calmly, like a matter of fact. Billy ignores her and looks directly to Steve, suddenly serious. "You know what? I've seen a new Family Video opening at the end of Maple Street. You should try to check it out."

Everybody freezes, incredulous. Max glares at her step-brother, trying to figure out the joke in his last sentence, Robin looks at Steve with a lifted eyebrow, and Steve moves slightly on his feet.

"O…ok. Yeah. We should do that." he stutters, after a way too long time, with a shrug. "Thanks… I guess?" he adds then, uncertain. Billy makes a step ahead, completely invading Steve's personal space, like usual, and he pats his chest. He speaks, and Steve can feel his nicotine breathe.

"Don't sweat it, amigo."

Steve swallows. They stare at each other for a moment that is, again, insanely too long, and then Billy is finally retrieving.

"See you around, princess. Buckley." he twists and starts to walk.

"Woa! I mean, he's in a good mood, isn't it?" Steve comments, looking briefly at the distancing boy who's lighting a cigarette. Max nods and smiles at them. "Yeah. He's doing way better. Almost can't recognize him." they can hear Billy shouting, now from a considerable distance.

"Max! get your ass here!"

She huffs and drops the skateboard to the ground. "Bye, Robin! Bye, princess!" Steve cannot complain to the sudden using of the embarrassing pet name even from her that she's already bolting away with her skate towards an annoyed smoking Billy. They can hear him scowls at her.

"No skating in the shop, shitbird." "Who says that?! There's no sign!" "Say me. Over."
Their voices eventually fade, Steve is still staring at their back until they disappear.

"Shit. That was pretty intense." he hisses after a while, turning towards Robin, who has remained sat for all the time, with the same, skeptical expression printed on her face. "Yeah, no shit, dingus. I have totally felt the idiotic sexual tension myself." she comments. Steve almost jumps in his place. "Shit, I KNOW! So I'm not freaking out, right?" "No." Robin admits. "I might be thinking that he wants to bang you as bad as you do."

Steve tries to contain his excitement. He moves his hair back with his trademark gesture, now full of nervous energy. However, Robin doesn't look as happy as him. "This doesn't change a thing about what I think about him." she adds, surprisingly serious. "What I've said at your place, the other day, rest. He's not a good person. He's not good for you, Steve."

Steve freezes. Robin's words suddenly report him to reality. "You don't know him." he spats after a while. "Neither do you." "He apologized to me, yesterday. Maybe that monster thing has changed him." "Maybe, but as I said, I can recognize a rotten person when I see one."

Rotten. Steve thinks about the ugly sole-shaped bruises on Billy's back, at the fading ones on his eye and cheekbone. That kind of stuff

makes a lot of sense, considering Billy's ever raging attitude. The guy is not a monster, he's just a troubled kid who gets beaten shit from his own dad, who, standing for what El has said, has been abandoned by his beloved mother, who lives in a very toxic environment. It's true, Steve doesn't know him, and still he despites him somehow, but he wishes he could understand him better. Everybody has demons, everybody deserves a second chance.

He turns to his friend, smiling slightly. "So, are we going to check this Family Video or what?"

"Did you get the goddam list?!" Billy asks nervously to his minion sister, who's following him trotting by his side. "I got it, shithead." she responds, taking off a piece of paper from her pocket. Billy rudely snatches it from her and read all the items with an irritated frown. He theatrically sighs, tilting his head back.

"That sucks."
"What?" asks Max, lifting an eyebrow. "The list of groceries, or...?"
"Nope, dumbass. The fact that I'm able to drive only when I'm doing fucking house chores or babysitting you. Can't do shit on my own, I'm stuck in this shithole."

Max takes a shopping cart and they start to walk through the compartments.

"Your car will be back, eventually. It's just temporary." Max assures, as a matter of fact. "I know, but until then I'm practically disabled." the red-head grabs her chin, thoughtful. "How are you even going to the Pool?" Billy leans on the edge of the cart with a wolfish grin. "Stole a fancy ass bike." he says, full of pride. Max scoffs and pushes him. "No shit." "I did it, shitbird. Used to steal a lot of bikes with Nate back in Cali."

Max swallows. That's the first time that Billy refers to Nathan after what, more than a year? And he doesn't even look slightly upset about it. That's way too strange, is he really her step brother? Or is he a clone from the upside-down, oddly nicer and sort of gentler?

She promptly ignores the Nate's part. "Really? You used to steal

bicycles?" Billy shrugs. "Yup. Then we would sell them. We needed money for drugs and boozes and my shit father has never given me shit. So. A man needs to adapt."

Max goes silent at this sudden… sincere opening by Billy. "I don't know much about you." she admits, almost whispering, checking on the tomato sauce, pensively. Billy shrugs again. "There aren't many nice things to know." he hisses, flatly. Max puts the tomato sauce on the cart, purposively avoiding eye contact with her step-brother. The conversation has gone awkward.

"You could ask Steve if you need a ride." she proposes after a straight minute of contemplative silence. Billy snorts, amused. "Harrington? Why's that?" "Well… he's a very helpful person." she says with a playful smirk, while checking on aubergines. "He's a toddler." Billy spats, playing with the eggplants without giving them very much attention. "It isn't something negative." she objects.

"He's a dumbass. Always helping people, like a fucking saint. Always being trampled by assholes. It makes me mad. He's so stupid." Billy explains, absently, like he's too focused on thinking. Max grimaces, it's not that she understands that much about Steve. But there's something strange about Billy's judgement, something unspoken. "What do you mean by 'trampled by assholes'?" "You know, that thing with the Wheeler bit… with Nancy. Everybody knows that he has been dumped because she was fucking that Byers weirdo. And then? They're all friends like nothing has ever happened. It's fucking pathetic."

Max is starting to get angry. Billy's being a presumptuous asshole, again. "You're judging a situation that you don't know. Besides, he helped you too, at the Byers, when you weren't able to go even to the bathroom by yourself, you jerk."

Ouch. That burns. Billy snaps, a sudden feeling of rage creep into his body. Then, he remembers his thoughts of the day before, under that fucking icy cold shower. So, he breathes, very slowly and carefully, and talks calmly with all the effort in the world. "Exactly, Maxine. That only proves my point, shitbird. He helped me, me, an asshole that has beat the shit out of him, because he's a golden child, a nurse hero complex boy that wants to help everyone in the world but can't

take care of himself. It makes me mad as hell."
Max stops in her place, looking at her step-brother like he's an alien. "What?!" he snaps, uneasy under her gaze. "Why do you care?" she asks. "You sound… oddly… interested?" Billy blinks, surprised, then, he groans, pissed by the turning point of that discussion. "I'm not. Mind your own fucking business, Maxine. Besides, it's his fault. He has taken me under his fucking protective wing these days, I have never asked him for his help. I don't like to be his new charity case."

Max raises her eyebrow, surprised. "He did? That's great, Billy. He's a great person. I think you two should totally become friends."

Billy scoffs, quickly walking towards the next compartment, now feeling nervous. A great person? A good friend? The idea of being the next wellness act of Harrington makes him sick. He doesn't want that, he doesn't want to be considered the frail, faggot that was crying in the shower. Fuck that! How are they ended up like this? Steve Harrington should be afraid of him, he has stolen his crown, his title, his aura of power. Steve should feel intimidated by it.

But... the fact is that Steve is above all that shit. He doesn't give a flying fuck. He's so above everything, that he's merciful and compassionate, that he has forgiven the big bad Billy, the psycho, the monster.

Billy clenches his fist. He doesn't want that. He doesn't want to be looked from up to the bottom, he doesn't want to feel that sense of inferiority, of insecurity. He wants Steve to look at him. To look at him for real. To notice him.

He has always wanted it; from the first time he had seen the infamous preppy king at that Halloween party. And, in the end, he had managed to be seen by him, but with disgust and hate. He had managed to leave a mark, purple and red horrible bruises on the boy's pretty face.

He hates himself for that. He hates himself for a lot of things, including the forbidden, impossible desire that had hit him from the first time they have met.
Max looks questioningly at his step-brother, who's now completely zoning out, staring blankly at a bottle of whisky in his hands.

"Billy?" she asks, finally collecting his attention. He grins and puts the bottle in the space between his tight jeans and his large black flowers pattern Hawaiian shirt on his back. "Medicinal booze." he states, making her roll her eyes badly. "Such an idiot." she comments, not too surprised by the stealing act of her step-brother.

"Takes one to know one."

Notes for the Chapter:

I don't encourage shoplifting lol

6. Planet Caravan

Summary for the Chapter:

Boys being boys at the quarry.

Dustin hasn't stop babbling about Suzie. Steve finds himself thinking, again, that he really needs to have a hobby that doesn't involve babysitting thirteen years old kids, while he drives the guy to the Byers for their D&D night.

He absently responds with standard statements like 'cool', 'awesome, man', while his mind is totally focused on a certain Californian jerk. As if Dustin had read his thoughts, he suddenly goes out with:"We still need to solve Hargrove's situation."

Steve gulps, tightening the grip on the steering wheel. If only Dustin knew the recent new arrangements. He sure isn't ready to admit to a thirteen years old kid that he may have a little, still unexplainable, crush on the guy.

"What about it, man? Clearly we can't stalk him like creepers." Steve says dryly. That's strange, it has been a few days since the last time he had seen the guy, but he hasn't thought about the 'super-power' question at all, he has totally forgotten it. It doesn't look important anymore, not now that he's more concentrated on understanding what the fuck is going on in his mind.

"We're not stalking him, Steve. We're trying to find out if one of the worst sociopath in Hawkins has got freaky Flayer-powers. You got something better to do?!"
Ironically, following Billy's advice about Family Video has really been a good idea. He and Robin had managed to get the job, and he was going to start the day after.
"Actually, I do, Dustin. I got the job." Steve claims, cocky. Dustin instantly makes a giant, toothless smile and starts to grab Steve's shoulder. "Dude! When were you even telling me that?! You got a job! You're non-unemployed anymore!!" Steve shakes him off. "Yeah, yeah. Yeeppe." he says without enthusiasm. He's still going for a mediocre job, waiting to understand what the fuck he wants to do

with his miserable life, under the constant pressure of his asshole businessman absent father, who's constantly disappointed by his lack of intelligence, charisma, attitude, everything…

"We should celebrate! Come join our campaign!" Dustin chirps, interrupting the depressing spiraling of his thoughts. Steve parks in front of the Byers, noticing Nancy's dad's car in front of the house. It's not unusual, and the guys are his friends now. They're on good terms. They're all buddies. Still… he doesn't like to be at the Byers. All the freaky shits happened there.
"Yeah, ehm, no thanks, pal… I'm kind of busy. Next time, ok?" Steve mumbles, causing instant disappointment in the kid's face. "Come ooon, dude! What do you have to do? Don't spend the night alone in your big house." at these words, Steve shivers. Is it really so obvious? Even a kid is lecturing him. God. Now he feels pathetic.

"Dustin." Steve turns at his friend in the passenger seat, still grabbing the steering wheel solidly. "Next time." this time, Dustin sighs, surrendered. "Ok. But you look strange, you know that? I can tell that there's something on in your head. And I will discover what's that, you know why?" Steve huffs and rolls his eyes. "Why, Dustin?" "Because…" and now the kid is severely pointing a finger towards the older boy, his frown incredibly serious and concentrated. "…You can't hide shit." he spats after a long pause. Steve raises his hands in surrender. "You got me! Now get off my car. I'll pick you up at around 10."

Dustin opens the door and turns again to face Steve, with the same ridiculous severe expression of before. "Remember, Steven…" he hisses. Steve groans. "Just go already!" the kid slams the door and glares one last time at Steve.

With extraordinary timing, a truck suddenly arrives and parks with a loud screech of the tires at a crazy speed.
Steve rolls his eyes, thinking of how that guy is really a public danger. Max drops off the vehicle with a jump. Steve can hear Billy yelling at her to be outside the house at 10, perfectly on time, otherwise 'she's skating home'. Steve grimaces, he knows that Billy can't afford to do that kind of threats, not with a father like his. But looks like insults are their usual way to communicate.

Max doesn't look touched by his manners. She just spats something like 'yeah, thanks a lot, asshole', then she waves a hand at Steve with a small smile and cheerfully hops towards the Byer's entrance, joining Dustin on the door.
Billy, from the truck, finally looks at Steve, but it's only for a moment. He smirks and slowly lights a cigarette.

"Hargrove." Steve is the first one to verbally acknowledge the presence of the other. He can feel the usual dizziness caused by the guy's arrival, that strange and fucked up uneasiness that makes him wanna hide under a hole.
Billy inhales the smoke with wearing slowness, taking all the time in the world to piss off Steve. They're both with the engines of the cars still running on, like they're ready to go at any moment.
"Harrington. You're in baby-sitting duty?" speaks Billy after a while, finally looking at the other boy between the windows of the cars. Steve shrugs. He wants to look noncaring. Absolutely casual. Undisturbed. "Something like that."

There's another pause where Billy is smoking and clearly scrutinizing Steve. He can feel Max and Dustin looking at them, curious.
"You know…" Steve starts, leaning on the seat. "…You were right about Family Video. A guy from school runs that, some Nerd from my class and… well, he took us. Thanks to Robin, to be honest. It's not that I have the best nomea with dudes like him."
Billy smirks again, looking feline and satisfied. "Well, well, well. King Steve is disguising himself with the working class again. Glad I've been helpful, your majesty."
Steve grimaces. "You know what, you're the only person that still calls me that." Billy grins and exhales a long wave of smoke. "Guess that makes me special." he states after a while, and it's something strange to say, Steve knows that. Steve wants to replay that no, he doesn't need to use pet names to be special, it's too late for that shit. Instead, he sighs, trying to prepare himself for the next thing he's going to say.

Max and Dustin go inside, not without a final, long nosy glare. They're dying to know what they are saying, but they never will.
Steve looks at Billy, confident, casual, almost bored. That's it. That's the player mode, the one of the guy that doesn't give a shit. Will it be

credible at Billy's sight?
"What are you doing now? Do you wanna hang out?"

Billy is taken by surprise. He blinks dumbly, and yes! That's a point for Steve. Then, the boy recollects himself in his usual cocky bad boy attitude. "What? Are you this desperate to have just kids for friends that you're asking me?" Steve scoffs. No. clearly that wasn't a good idea. "Ok. Whatever. Forget it." he spats. He's almost about to drive away when Billy talks. "Geez, that was a joke! Relax, princess. Don't get your panties in a twist. That's fine, I would be honored to hang out with your majesty." he's still messing with him, but at least he said yes. Steve needs to hold back his excitement.

Come on, man. Try to look cool. You don't give a shit. You just want to hang out, dudes being dudes. He internally repeats.
"Still-" Billy talks, sounding now more annoyed. "I'm grounded for like… dunno, forever? For the Starcourt story and the Camaro." he bitterly admits, sounding sad, and for a moment he looks younger and frail again. Steve gulps, feeling suddenly guilty. "Shit, I didn't know, sorry man…" but he stops talking when he sees the sneering expression on Billy's face. "I'm not. I don't give a flying fuck. We can still hang out, but you need to give me a ride. Park a few blocks from my place, like around number ten or something. I'll go home and I'll sneak out from the window, they won't notice."

Steve stares wide-eyed at the boy, still processing that big amount of instructions. That was… an unexpected turn of events. But with Billy Hargrove is always like that.
"O…ok." he stutters, giggling lightly. "Geez, so many instructions. So secretive. Feels like dating Nancy again." Steve instantly regrets that. Gosh, why the fuck did he say that?! Why can't he keep his damn mouth shut?

Billy doesn't flinch at the comparison, like he's not bothered at all. Doesn't accuse Steve to be a fag or something like that. He just purrs. "Pretty boy. You still haven't seen anything. I'm waay better than Nancy."

And, after that, he bolts away on Neil's truck, without adding anything, leaving Steve all sweated and nervous on the seat. Shit. What if Robin's right? What if Billy Hargrove really wants to bang

him?

He's waiting for him for at least twenty minutes, sitting in the driver seat of his Beemer. Summer is ending, so the evenings are starting to get chilly. He has the window rolled down, to feel that pleasant breeze. Moreover, he really thinks that air can be useful, he needs to oxygenate his fuzzy brain.

Steve hasn't stopped to ask himself what is he doing. The rational part of his mind is suggesting that he's just about to spend some time with another dude that has been revealed less insufferable than what he had thought, but the instinctive part of him is screaming that he's spiraling down into something that he doesn't know and that's totally beyond his control.

He chooses to ignore every warning thought and just… goes with that. He will see. He will figure it out. It's not a big deal. Just him, about to spend what looks like some sort of a date with Billy Hargrove, the psycho asshole that previously beat him and then turned in a suspected owner of freaky Flayer-powers, even if that is a point that still has to be proven.

He jumps when he hears someone opening the door of the passenger seat, too lost in his thoughts. Billy sits without grace and slams the door. Then, he grins to Steve, all cocky and apparently undisturbed. GOSH, Steve wishes he had the same attitude.

"What took you so long?" he asks, kind of rude, revving the engine. Billy shrugs and stretches the legs in the front space. "I had to be sure that the place was clear, pretty boy. Can't afford to be caught in this romantic sneaking of yours." Steve swallows, trying to not look embarrassed by this last sentence, and starts to drive. He has the feeling that Billy had made him wait just to piss him off. Just to be the usual Rockstar that comes late, making everyone desire him even more. He slightly shakes his head at this stupid idea.
"So, where are we going, big boy?" he asks, casually, even if he has already started to drive towards an unknown destination. Billy lights a cigarette and inhales a long drag of smoke. "I think you already know the answer." he states after a while, looking absently at the road.

Steve sighs. So let it be the quarry. The perfect place where people get high and couple get laid.

They stay silent for some time. Billy doesn't seem bothered, while Steve is internally melting. But he doesn't want to say anything stupid, he doesn't want to look nervous or on the edge due to Hargrove's presence next to him.

"God, this place is fuckin creepy." Billy comments, looking at the dark trees next to the road. Steve makes a small laugh and runs a hand in his hair. "You don't really wanna know." Billy turns towards him, his attention raised. "What? What do I don't wanna know?" "Nothing." Steve cuts off, biting his lip. "Forests aren't really safe in this area. There are… things, better not to meet them."

Billy blinks, and looks like he's trying to understand if Steve is messing with him or not. "Things? Like… what? Like that… how did the brats call it, Mind Flayer?" Steve sighs. "Yeah. I mean, now it shouldn't be a problem… El, Hopper's daughter, she…" "…Closed the gate. Yeah. I know that, still, I don't understand a shit about it. A giant thing possessed me for almost a week making me do all the crazy shits, then a kid with freaky mind powers fucked up my brain, and then I find myself in Byer's home with you and Max bitching about me being flayed or not." Billy sounds angry, pissed. How did they end up in that conversation? If there's something that Steve really doesn't want to talk about, is that freaky upside down shitshow.

"You didn't look very… inclined in getting involved." Steve debates, annoyed. Billy huffs and lets his head fall on the seat. "Excuse me if I was trying to understand what the fuck was happening. However, now I'm inclined to get involved." he says the last words in a mocking tone.

They have reached the quarry. Steve parks and exhale a long breath, preparing himself for a not too easy conversation. "It's a long story." he spats after a while. Billy grins and presses the cigarette on his lips, taking a slow drag. "Well, looks like we have some spare time tonight, so, start talking, pretty boy. I'm all ears." he puts a hand on his right pocket, looking for something, raising his right foot in order to have better access. Those tight jeans don't look very comfortable

when it comes to sneak something out of them. Steve looks at him absent-mindedly, not really paying attention. He's searching for the right words where to start with the story.

"I don't know that much." he admits, uncertain. "There are… things, monsters, that come from another world. Is like, another dimension, that looks like ours but way more… hellish." Billy looks at him, with a frown. He doesn't look about to laugh. Maybe being possessed by the Mind Flyers has been enough to make him believe that crazy story. He resumes his searching, mumbling something between his teeth. Steve takes it as a sign to go on. "The first time I saw one of those things it was at the Byers. I was trying to apologize to Nancy for being an asshole…" Billy snorts. Steve promptly ignores him. "… And I found myself fighting with them against a… the kids call it Demogorgon. From their stupid board game. But there are demodogs too, who resemble dogs, as the name suggests. They all come from the Upside Down. There was… a crazy lab, in the forest of Hawkins. They opened the Gate and made them come here." Billy stops, pensive. "Why did they do that?" Steve scoffs. "Fuck If I know. El, the psychic girl, she comes from the Lab. She's an experiment, they made her do that kind of stuff."

There's a long, silent pause, broken only by the sounds from the nearby forest. "How is Max involved in that shit?" Billy asks, and it looks like he's really trying to put the pieces of the puzzle in order. Finally, he reaches what he was searching for: a small package of cellophane that smells like weed. Steve pinches the bridge of his nose. "Dude." he just says. "Go on, princess." Billy urges him, getting the papers from the other pocket.

"What do you wanna know?" asks Steve, with a confused frown. Billy continues the preparation of the joint with sharp movements, still, he looks focused. "That night. At the Byers. The one where I…" "Beat the shit out of me?" Steve continues, venomous. "…Yeah, that one." Billy agrees, flatly. "It was something like that, wasn't it?"
Steve hesitates. He sighs and turns towards the dark forest, lighted only by the headlight of the Beemer. "Yeah. I was trying to protect them." Billy lights the joint and takes a long drag. The strong scent instantly fulfills the air. "And what about the Mind Flayer?" he asks after a while, letting the arm leaning lazily from the window of the

passenger seat. "What about it?" "Is it, dunno, different from the demogorgs or the fuck you've called them?" Steve takes some time to think about the answer. "I think so. It's like, the mind behind all of them. Those things, they're all connected."

Billy exhales a long cloud of smoke and then passes the joint to the other. "That's fucking crazy." he comments, with a voice oddly calm, considered the topic of that conversation. Steve takes the joint and makes a drag. "I know, right? Bet you don't find Hawkins a boring town anymore." Billy snorts, fitting himself better on the seats. "Maybe not boring, I give you that." then, he snaps, remembering something. He reaches his back pocket and pulls out a tape. Without saying anything, he puts it in the radio. Steve stares at him, blinking stupidly.

"I thought your taste in music was shit so I decided to give you one of my mixtapes." Billy explains, practical, without sentiment. "Dude, you don't even know my taste in music!" Steve complains, even if he finds that gesture kind of… nice? "I fucking hate Metallica and all the metal shits you blast from your car." he adds, sounding more annoyed than what he really is. Billy rolls his eyes, and maybe he's not killing Steve just because he's high and strangely relaxed. "First of all, they're not shits. Second, will you just relax and stop being a bitch for a minute?! This is a playlist for when I'm high. It's, like, *tripping chillout*." he tells the ultimate statements gesticulating in an oddly childish way, and maybe Steve can blame the weed that's starting to kicking in, but damn, he kind of look cute. Almost.

"Tripping chillout." he repeats, sassy. "Did you think hard about it?" Billy laughs and pushes him slightly. "Screw you, Harrington. Just listen and learn something."
The music starts and, surprisingly, it's kind of nice. Calm. Psychedelic.
"My, my. You surprise me, Hargrove. I didn't expect you to be stoner type." Steve mocks, moving the joint to the other boy. "You don't know me." he spats, taking rudely the joint from Steve's fingers and bringing it to his mouth. Steve shrugs. "You're right. I don't. What's that? It sounds like the Doors or something, hippy shit." Billy wrinkles his nose. "Naah. It's Black Sabbath, dumbass. The meeting point of hippies and metalheads, I guess." "It's nice." "I told you."

They smoke for a few minutes, in silence, listening to the slow music. Then. Billy throws the joint out of the window, on the wet grass.
"My mom." he says casually, avoiding Steve's eye contact. "She was into this kind of stuff. She was a hippy." Steve looks at him, curious and slightly surprised by the sudden opening. It's not that Billy likes to reveal anything about him. Maybe he's really starting to trust Steve, after all.

Steve finds himself thinking that he craves that. He wants to know Billy, he wants to see his true self, he wants to see him exposed, vulnerable.
The image of the boy in the bathtub suddenly resurfaces in his mind. Goddamit, that's not the fucking moment to think about that.

Steve gulps and tries to talk nonchalantly, not as if he had just thought about his little fantasy about Billy naked. "How come she was with your old man? No offense, man, but he is kind of a dick…"

Unexpectedly, Billy makes a small laugh. "No shit, Harrington. My father is an asshole. And yeah, I don't know how the fuck they got together. She, a hippy all peace and love and shit, him, a fucking war veteran or something. And from this already fucked up mix came me… the child of Satan."

They stare at each other for some seconds, then, they both burst into a loud laugh. After some more time to recollect themselves, Billy takes out a cigarette and lights it. Steve is seriously impressed by how the lungs of the guy must be heavy. "What about you, Stevie?" Billy asks, with the cigarette between his lips. "Tommy H. used to say that you had a huge mansion. Used to throw parties every weekend, no parents in sight." Steve wrinkles his nose, slightly annoyed. "Tommy H. is such an asshole." "I know, right?" Billy agrees, looking amused. Why is he always hanging out with Tommy if he thinks so low of him? Wait. Steve thinks that he already knows the answer.

"However, it's not a big mansion. And Tommy shouldn't speak, his father is one of my father's best friend, so, you can imagine how loaded he could be."
Billy snorts. "Let me guess. Country club. Same college." Steve sighs. "Yeah, something like that." "Suppose that a guy like your old man has tons of expectations about his golden child. Like continuing the

dynasty or some shit like that." Steve nods. He is actually surprised about how Billy is literally reading him like an open book. He's almost resembling him Robin. Billy is scrutinizing him with those piercing blue eyes that make him feel dumb. Steve purposefully avoids eye contact. The blonde speaks again after a while. "How come you're not going to some fancy ass college instead of rotting in this shithole town?" Yeah. How come. He makes a bitter laugh and turns over the window.
"Because I wasn't accepted anywhere. My grades at school were shit and I don't know what to do with my life so I'm just… I don't know, killing time while waiting for something nice to happen, something that can make me understand better myself." Steve's voice is acute, broken by angst and bitterness. He can feel the usual grip of sadness and anxiety starts to kick in his throat. He blames the weed. Now he really wants to go home. He rubs his palms on his eyes and sighs loudly. "Now you can laugh at me, Hargrove. Since you're dying to do it."

But when he moves his hands away, he finds Billy looking at him oddly serious. His eyebrows are frowning, and he stares at Steve like he's trying to solve a complex equation.
"Hey, screw your dad." Billy spats, after a while. Steve snorts. "What?!" "Screw him. And whoever makes you feel dumb or not good enough. We constantly have to… fulfill society's expectations of us. Just for making other people that we hate happy. Screw that. People like your father will never be satisfied, he will always have ways to take you down and feel miserable. So fuck it. The sooner you understand it, the better you'll feel. You just need some time to figure it out your shit, ain't nothing bad about it. Stop pushing yourself so down, that's not you who's talking. It's him"-

Steve blinks, trying to realize the brief, intense speech of the other boy. He suddenly takes back the urge to kiss him right now. He playfully pushes the guy on the shoulder, giggling. "Damn… you're wise, Hargrove. Who would have thought it?" Billy groans, but his expression is amused. "You know shit about me, pretty boy. I could surprise you."
"Yeah. You're already surprising me." Steve smiles and squeezes the other boy's shoulder. An innocent, playful gesture that is screaming to become something else. Billy stares right through his eyes, and

smiles back. And god, Steve thinks how good is that expression on his face, so pure and relaxed. There's no more venom, no more anger. He looks just like himself, his real form. Beautiful.

Steve decides to recollect himself before he does something stupid. He clears his voice and stops touching the guy.
"We should get back to the brats."

Billy snaps, like he has been interrupted from some deep thought. "Yeah, you right."
He starts the engine and leaves the dark abyss of the quarry behind them, his heart still pounding madly and his nostril intoxicated by Billy's cologne.

"You're acting weird." Max comments, her lips slightly curved in a small smirk. "I'm not." Billy immediately objects, maybe too fast, tapping the steering wheel whit the music on the radio, some stupid pop song that he actually hates. Ok, maybe that's enough to be considered weird.

"You are. You seem happy." "I'm not." Billy spats childishly, but he can't hide his stupid expression, his stupid smile. He hasn't felt like this in a while. When first Steve has asked him out, he has thought about some stupid charity act by the guy who needs to help everyone. But he accepted, because he's an idiot. Because he can't help himself. He craves Steve's attention; he craves his eyes on him. But then… the time they had spent together has been nice beyond every expectation. And Billy has started to think, to believe… that maybe he's not just a stupid charity act for the guy. Maybe he really gives a shit about him, maybe he's really interested in his company beyond any other freaking reason…

"There's nothing wrong in being happy, once in a while." Max insists, because she's a nosy bitch. But maybe she's right, maybe he can temporarily allow himself to feel something that it's not rage, hate and fear. He knows it's stupid. He also knows that what he feels towards the preppy boy has nothing to do with wanting to be his friend. He's fucked up, after all. He can't avoid being a fucking fag. He can't avoid desiring the boy's hands on him.

What would Steve say? Would he watch him in disgust? Would he stop talking to him? If, for example, he would surrender at the instinct to kiss the hell out of him.
But yet… there have been moments, several moments, where Billy swore, he had felt the same desire in the other boy. That night, before they left, it looked a lot like Steve was about to kiss him. Damn, the guy was squirming on the seat all the time, looking all jittery and jumpy like a birdie. Maybe it was because Billy had broken his face not too much time before, but what if was something else? What if Steve was feeling the same urge? To taste those lips, to put a hand into those soft, long hair…

"Now you have a very weird expression on your face." Max teases him, amused. Damn! Billy was daydreaming like a moaning bitch. "Shut up! Mind your own fucking business, shitbird." he spats, trying to recollect his usual self.

The road is dark, empty and creepy as hell, like every road in that bumfuck place. Billy grips tighter the steering wheel, when something bolts all of a sudden from the side of the street, crossing it at the speed of light. It's just a fraction of a second, it's a grey, big figure that vaguely looks like a dog.
Billy brakes, making the truck almost skid with a loud screech. They both use some seconds to understand what the fuck happened. The first thought of Billy is: *Am I alive?* So he checks on his body and yes, looks like everything is still in place. Then he turns towards Max, who's breathing ragingly in fear.

"Hey, you ok?" he asks. She sniffles and nods, her lower lips trembling slightly, like she's about to cry. Billy unbuckles the seatbelt and hugs her. She puts her tiny arms on his neck and that's strange, it's not they have ever really done this before. Feels strange. How many people have Billy hugged in his life? Not many. His mother, surely. And Nathan. No one else. Hugging and cuddling is kind of an alien thing for him.

"What was that?" she asks, voice broken. "A deer. Nothing to worry about." Max snaps back, looking outraged. "That was not a deer, asshole!" Billy raises his hands in surrender. "What?! Why are you upset?" "Because!" she starts, then she makes a pause, trying to find what to say. "You… can't possibly know. It was not a deer, Billy. That

was something else. Something bad."

Billy looks at her all serious. At least the urgency of the situation has brought him away from the spiraling of his super gay thoughts about Harrington.
"A demodog?" he asks, and Max gasps, surprised. "How do you know about them?!" "Steve told me." this information seems to surprise her even more. "Steve? When?" "That's not fucking relevant, Maxine." "Were you with him tonight?! Is this why you're so in a good mood?"

Billy groans loud and lets his head fall back on the seats in exhaustion. "You're a nosy bitch, you know that?!" at least she's not upset anymore. She speaks all cheerfully. "It's great, Billy! I'm so happy you guys get along!" Billy rolls his eyes. "MAX, holy fucking shit. We have almost invested a creepy creature from another dimension and you're here bitching about my private life?!" Wrong choice. Her expression gets excited even more. "Private?! So there's something secretive going on?! Steve?! I thought he liked girls, but that's great!"

Billy pinches the bridge of his nose and tries to breathe slowly. That's it. He has become a fucking grade A Zen guy. He should be really proud of himself.
"Max. Cut the crap." Finally, she recognizes the seriousness in her stepbrother's voice, and her smile fades. Billy starts the engine and starts to drive quickly, an itching sensation on his stomach.

"What?! We're gonna drive away like this?!" Max complains, and Billy sighs and god, he wishes she could just shut up. "What do you want me to do? Monster hunting? Not on my shift, young lady. I have to get your scrawny ass at home before curfew, over."
Max snorts. "That thing could kill someone tonight." "Bad for them. Tomorrow we're going to… I don't fucking know, tell someone? And then we will figure it out." Billy explains, practical. Max stares at him, and he can instantly feel irritation growing. "What?!" he spats, venomous. "You're new in this. You don't know what to do. You're the newbie among us."

Billy rolls his eyes. "I'm not part of your stupid nerd club." he declares, heavily. Max smirks. "Yes, now you are. Besides, Steve is one of us." "I don't give a damn about what Harrington does." "Sure

thing, newbie."

Billy glares at her. Damn her. She had become more and more badass and now she has the guts to treat him like that.

She really needs to learn her place.

7. Boys don't cry

Summary for the Chapter:

Lectures & Monster Hunting

Looks like Billy has finally gained back his old splendor at the Hawkins Community Pool.

After days spent dragging his own exhausted body around, avoiding small talks as much as possible, Billy finally feels that he's back on track. Sure, he's still tired, drained from the recent events and mentally unstable, but at least the grip on his throat is gone, and he feels like he's able to breathe again.

People notice that, notice his confident walk, his old gestures from his cocky self. Is like Billy is glowing again, and he loves that. He simply loves people to look at him, to crave him. He loves to show his body, like it is an authentic piece of art.
He walks towards his workstation under the gaze and whispers of everyone. Yes, this is the first time he's without a shirt in days, even if it sounds paranormal. There are still ugly bruises on his ribs, but they're fading and, after all, Billy doesn't give a shit.

He greets the desperate housewives, causing a response in unison. There's also Karen Wheeler with them. Billy looks at her just for a fleeting moment. They haven't talked after all the shit that had happened. He isn't even sure about what happened in the end, the night they were supposed to hook up he had been possessed by the Mind Flyer, then, he vaguely remembers her talking to him the day after, saying something like she was sorry. Did she ditch him?
What a bitch. Billy thinks all of a sudden, irritated by the rejection that he didn't even use to remember in the beginning.

He climbs in his workstation, ready to yell at whoever dares not to respect the rules under his shift. That one is the last week where the Pool is still open, then, September will start, bringing the Summer with it. Billy will start his senior year, then he will be finally able to get the fuck out of that shithole, go back to Cali and fucking say adieu to Neil and his wife.

He thinks about Max and Harrington. The idea of leaving them makes him feel strange. A bad type of strange.
The afternoon proceeds peacefully, almost boring. But bored is better than jumpy, depressed and crazy like he was the previous days. He's interjected by missis Wheeler during his break, in the middle of his shift, while he's smoking leaning lazily against the sidewall of the building.

"Billy." she calls him, and she's smiling at him in a strange way, it doesn't look the usual, shy-but-dirty-flirty mood, but more like a normal, polite smile without sexual implications. "Hi, missis Wheeler." he responds, smiling and keeping a low tone too.
She looks at him, squirming awkwardly on her spot, then she exhales a nervous small laugh. "I wanted to say… you look good!" Billy smirks and lifts an eyebrow, an amused expression that suggests something like 'seriously? You wanna play again?', but she giggles and shakes her head, making her earrings shimmer. "I mean…" she corrects, gesturing towards him, never stop smiling. "…I knew that this has been a rough period for you. I've seen you… well, devastated."
Billy can't avoid widng his eyes in surprise. Shit. Did he look this bad?! He really needs to regain his reputation, he had fallen so low in the previous days.

"And… I know that Heather's death had been very hard for you." she continues, and now she looks damn serious, like she has spent time preparing that talk. Billy tries to look untouched. He presses the cigarette on the ashtray on the trash-bin, avoiding eye contact with missis Wheeler while she continues her speech.
"…And I feel responsible. It's also my fault. I shouldn't have given you the wrong idea. You… you're just a boy. I'm the grown adult here, so, I just wanted to apologize to you. And say that I'm glad you're good again, I tried to give you some space, because you looked… very upset. But now… I'm just happy you look more like your old self."
A sudden wave of irritation crashes Billy's gut. What the fuck does this bitch want? She seriously believes that she's part of his problems?! She seriously gives this high importance about herself?

However, he keeps back in his brain all these thoughts and grins

wolfishly, his hands on the hips. He doesn't want to talk about Heather, about his fucking feelings. So, he can only play the bad boy card to avoid looking like a fairy queer that cries in the shower.
"Apologies accepted, missis Wheeler. Besides, I'm always available to give you advanced lessons if you would change your mind, eventually." she gasps, surprised. Maybe she didn't expect something like that. Then, she sighs, and sounds almost tired, surrendered, apprehensive. Shit. Billy hates that, and he doesn't know why. "You don't have to do that. You don't have to be like this, Billy. It's ok. You already impressed me, you already impressed everyone in this town. You should stop to constantly prove people stuff, and start be more like yourself."

Now, Billy really starts to feel an itching sensation in his hands. He internally fights not to snap on her and tell her to fuck off and mind her own business. What the fuck is that lecture for?! She's not his fucking mom.

He wishes he could tell her that be more himself means being a cocksucker fairy boy, but she doesn't need to know that. He scoffs and looks away, annoyed. "Ok. You finished?" he just spats, and this is the first time he's talking honestly with this woman, the first time he's not flirting, the first time he's showing part of his real, asshole self.
She doesn't look touched. "Yeah, yeah I'm done. Sorry for bothering you. And, Billy" she suddenly grabs his forearm, Billy glares at the point of contact "…It's good to have you back."

She leaves, and Billy sighs, resting his head against the wall. Screw her. She was ready to get bent for him till a week before and now she talks like she's this big, wise woman that can psychoanalyze him and tell him what to do. Screw her.

The rest of the afternoon passes quickly, he's nervous for the missis Wheeler fact but eventually he's able to cool it off without verbally or physically fighting anyone. He's really a fucking Zen Man now.
He showers quickly, always chased by the fear of a sudden burnout under the water, like the one that he had few days before that had been embarrassingly witnessed by Harrington.

He dresses up in Pool's clothes, it's not that he has to see someone on

a date and being well dressed anyway, so he puts on a white tank with red writings, blue shorts, adidas slippers and a white and red hat. He looks strange with the hat but his hair is messy and he doesn't want to spend time fixing it.
Then, he gets out of the building with a cigarette on his lips, ready to biking home. What he's not expecting is to find Harrington's Beemer next to his fancy stolen bike, with Harrington himself leaning on the side of it, sided by Max, Buckley and that kid Henderson.

He stops in his spot, blinking behind his Rayban sunglasses. "What the actual fuck." he just says, surprised. Harrington points his car with a thumb a speaks resolutely. "You're going with us, Hargrove. Get in the car."

Billy makes a few steps ahead. "What? No?" he just says, strangely calm. Max shakes her head. "There's no time, Billy. You know what he had seen yesterday, we need to fix this."
At these words, Billy takes off his glasses and glances at his stepsister. "Are you telling me that all this kidnapping thing is about monster hunting or something?" he asks, gesturing at them with the hand where he keeps the sunglasses. "Are you fucking nuts?" he adds, flatly. Steve chuckles, rolling his eyes. "We're not kidnapping you, Hargrove. You're too much a big, grown boy for that, don't you think?" Billy grunts and try not to blush, but he's not sure if he succeeds in that.

Dustin curses in his teeth. "Guys! I told you he was going to be an asshole. What did you expect?" Max ignores him and talks firmly. "Billy, this is very, very important. That thing outside can be really dangerous, that thing kills people, and we don't know if there are others around. We need to fix this, before it's too late." Billy looks hesitant, like he's considering his options. Max reads his mind. "Mom and Neil are out of town and they will be out for dinner too. It's all covered, come on! Get in the car!"

Billy still isn't convinced. He looks at his outfit and speaks with an unusual tone of insecurity in his voice. "…But I'm in slippers and swimsuits…" everybody groans loud. Steve approaches him and grabs his bicep. "Are you really going to bitchin about how you're dressed, Billy? Come on, get in the car. Don't worry, you're still hot. I'm sure that the demodogs will be thrilled." Billy mumbles something,

flustered, embarrassed and defeated, letting himself dragged. Buckley is smirking maliciously.
They briefly argue about who is going to sit next to Steve, and Billy can't believe he eventually accept to sit in the back next to Max and Buckley, unable to win over Harrington's firm tone about 'his car, his rules'. He has really gone soft.

"So what is your plan, uh? Searching for monsters and kick them with a bat"- Billy asks, trying to sound like the usual, cocky self. "Pretty much." Steve admits, while driving. "El will be there." Dustin announces, turning his head back to him. Billy lifts an eyebrow, all calm and collected, his legs spread as much as he can in the backseat and his hands resting on his thighs. "The psychic chick?" he asks, even if he already knows the answer. He doesn't know how to feel at the idea of meeting her after all that happened. He basically tried to kill her, a few times, and she basically read his mind and discovered all the freaky shits he has always kept for himself. Shit, does she know that he's a queer? Has she told anyone? That is beyond embarrassing.

Max notices his squirming in the seat. She grabs his arm, and he looks at her questioningly. What is with everyone that day? Why is everyone fucking touching him? He hates physical contact.
Steve nods, and then talks all pensive. "You know, she really wants to talk to you. She asked about you, expressly." Billy scoffs. "Is this why you're dragging me in this nuthouse little adventure?" Max rolls her eyes, but she doesn't leave his arm. "No, dumbass. You're going with us because you're involved in this, you like it or not." he grimaces at her confident, firm tone. Arrogant little brat.

"What, Hargrove? Are you afraid to confront a miniature sized woman?" Buckley asks, all mockery. Billy snorts. She's right, he is kind of afraid of El, in an odd way. "You fucking wish, Buckley."

They arrive in a small clearing near the forest. Steve parks next to Byers's car, and they're all already here. The freak Byers, his weirdo brother and the princess Nancy Wheeler, that little bitch Wheeler junior, Max's boyfriend Lucas Sinclair, a middle-age woman that Billy supposes should be Johnathan's mom, and then there she is, the psychic kid, El.
They're all discussing something when they come out from the

Beemer. Billy is tense, like, really tense. He doesn't fucking want to be there, among all those people. People that he tried to kill, several times. Max trots to her boyfriend, Byer's mom stops talking and immediately goes to Billy, squeezing his shoulder. "Billy, sweetheart! It's so good to have you with us. I'm Joyce Byers, Will and Johnathan's mom." Billy reddens and becomes even more tensed and awkward, the total opposite of his usual flirty self. "Uhm, hi… I'm Billy Hargrove, I guess." he mumbles, stupidly, and she's laughing. "Yeah, I know that, hun. You slept in my bed for two days straight. It's a shame that we couldn't interact before, but I was out of town with El when you woke up."

Billy shivers. So, she's the owner of the bed he crashed while he was unconscious. She's also the owner of the plate he crashes on Steve's skull in November of the previous year. "Ah… ehm… sorry about that, Ma'am." he stutters, feeling the heat on his cheek. Harrington laughs and pats his shoulder with camaraderie. "Oh, my! He's so cute when he's embarrassed." Billy snaps and instantly glares at him, but Joyce is laughing too and she is… kind of sweet? Like, motherly sweet? "No need to worry about that, sweetheart. But now… there's someone who was dying to meet you." she gently grabs his arm and guides him towards a little girl that has been aside with Wheeler junior all the time.
Billy feels his hands sweating, he's fucking nervous like a bitch at her first date and everybody is staring at him and he wishes he could die. He's not even dressed as his usual hot self, goddamit! Even if Steeve doesn't think so…

El looks straight at him with her big doe eyes, and she smiles. Wheeler is keeping her hand and glaring at him, like he's a disgusting creature or something, and honestly, is not that Billy can really blame him.

She speaks, her voice is soft. "Hey, Billy." he smiles back, awkwardly. "Hey kid. How is it going?"
"Sad. My dad is gone." and, holy shit, that's kind of heavy to process. Billy bites his lip and looks away, feeling a sense of anxiety rising up. "I know. I'm so sorry, kid." he just mumbles, wishing he could just disappear and escape from that situation.
El smiles. "Not your fault." Billy scoffs. "Maybe not this one, yeah."

"Not your fault." El insists, firm, looking straight into his eyes. Billy can't keep eye contact. He sighs and swift a hand on his face, in an exhausted gesture. He can feel his eyes start watering, and damn, why does he have to be always a damn crying bitch?!

Joyce, luckily, is the one to say to leave them alone. And, yeah, maybe it's best not to have a fucking audience that eavesdrop on them. Of course, little Wheeler complains like a bitch for a while, but then he accepts and walks away with the others, finally leaving them alone.

Billy lights a cigarette, his back pressed on the trunk of a tree, in the desperate attempt of protection. El is in front of him, and she's obviously staring with her wide brown eyes.
"I'm sorry I hurt you, kid." Billy finally says, after some time. El shakes her head. "It's fine. You weren't you." he grimaces. Like he normally was a decent human being in other circumstances. It's not that the Mind Flayer had twisted his nature. "I'm also sorry for you old man." "You lost people too." she replies. Billy shivers. How much does she know? "Yeah, yeah I did, kid." "You're hurt." she continues and damn, Billy feels naked under her sight, like she really can stare right into his soul. "You were angry. And lonely. This is why it chose you."

He swallows. That's true and kind of hard to accept. "Yeah, I think so." he agrees, taking a drag of his cigarette, fighting the urge to cry like a fairy in front of that kid.
"But you're not… lonely. Anymore. I want to tell you that. You're not alone. Stop being angry with yourself. You're not monster. You're not bad. You're… pretty. Like your moma."
Billy freezes, gasping, uncertain. His cheeks are red again, his eyes lucid, and he can't really think about anything sensible to say. El understands that and simply makes a step ahead and hugs him. He awkwardly reciprocates, hearing Wheeler complaining at distance, yelling something like 'first my mom, then my girlfriend', but he doesn't give a flying fuck. It's strange, he has hugged two persons in less than 24 hours, while he usually doesn't do that kind of shit in his life.

He has really gone soft.

Steve takes him aside, moving them a few meters from the rest of the group. He squeezes his shoulder and looks at him all apprehensive. It's almost touching, if Billy wasn't about to throw up at his annoying concerned expression.

"You ok with El?"
Billy scoffs. "Yeah, we ok, pretty boy. Stop worrying like a bitch." Steve raises his hands in surrender. "Geez, ok, man! I just look out for you." Billy looks at him, keeping eye contact for come seconds, then, he grins and rolls his eyes. "I'm a grown big boy, aren't I? Maybe I don't need a babysitter that follows me all the time." he's mocking him, using his own words against him. Steve flushes slightly and it's a victory for Billy. "I don't know, Hargrove. You seem like a big, noisy, child to me. Someone has to keep an eye on you." Billy steps ahead, getting closer to the brunette, breathing his same air, challenging him, looking right into his brown, pretty eyes.

Does he want to play? *Yeah. Let's play, pretty boy.*

Billy grabs Steve's collar of his preppy blue polo shirt, and starts to play with it, absent-mindedly. "And that person… must be you, King Steve? Are you sure you can handle me?" Steve smirks, his eyes crossed by a flash of excitement. "Oh, I'm sure you're not so tough like you say. You're all talking, Hargrove." Billy licks his lips, ferine, Steve follows the movement, mesmerized. "You wanna go for it?" and, holy shit, Billy thinks that he might be serious, Steve looks too flustered and focused on his tongue to not be really interested in tasting it, but then a feminine voice breaks their contest, making them do a step back, suddenly caught.

"Holy fucking shit, guys! Get a room! Stop fuckin flirting! We're in the middle of something." It's Robin, all annoyed and sarcastic, and Steve instantly snaps from the player mode to a stuttering mess. "We were… we weren't… we weren't fucking flirting, Rob!" she rolls her eyes. "Sure, dingus. I don't care. Let's catch the others." Billy glares at her, while Steve clears his voice and rushes towards the group. Max is watching him, smirking devilishly. Billy scoffs. "Shut the fuck up." he spats. Lucas is watching him with a strange expression between disgusted and confused. "I haven't say anything, asshole." she laments. "Then don't."

They end up being divided pretty much as how they arrived there, with the difference that, of course, Sinclair is with them, how can he stay away from his beloved girlfriend?
Steve reaches a bat to Billy, this one without nails. "Seriously?" he asks, skeptical, causing a huge roll of eyes in the other. "How do you think you're going to fight the monsters, Hargrove? With your bare hands?" Billy scoffs and rudely snatches the bat out the other's hand.
"A machete would have been better." he comments after a while. "Well, we don't have one. So, behave, big boy."

They walk for about twenty minutes, and Billy is starting to think that, after all, that monster hunting is really boring shit. They're following the railroad, which is pretty lame considering that the train there passes like, two times in a day.

Suddenly, Dustin approaches him and starts to walk next to him. He has a concerned frown, like he's looking for the right thing to say. Max and Lucas are behind them, followed by Steve and Robin who are chatting about something that Billy cannot hear.

He watches the kid, perplexed. "The fuck you want?" "I don't like you." Dustin talks too fast. Billy snorts. "Well, yeah, It's not my p…" "But Steve does." Dustin interrupts him, and now he's looking straight to his eyes, full of determination. Billy wants to laugh at him, wants to say really mean stuff, but he knows that Harrington is a bitch for that kid so he tries to keep his comments for himself.

"I trust Steve, so if he believes that there's something good in you, I believe him." Dustin continues. Billy stays silent, waiting for the weirdo to go on. "I really don't understand what's your deal with him, how come you're suddenly friends…" "We're not." but Dustin promptly ignores him. "…But I respect that. He said that you're not so bad anymore, that you even apologized to him." There's another pause, broken by the sounds of their steps on the grass.

"But you should remember that I'm watching you. I always keep an eye open, and If you're going to hurt Steve again you will have to deal with me, with us." he points towards the others, and Billy really wants to laugh at the lame threats. Kid is cute. Touching.

He sighs, absently playing with the bat, questioning himself how difficult should be to crack a skull open with a thing like that. A skull of a kid? Doesn't sound too challenging.

"Don't get your panties in a twist, Henderson. I'm not going to hurt your precious Steven. Besides, he's the one that is always pissing me off like an annoying bitch." Dustin groans, irritated. "Because he cares about you, dumbass! You should be grateful instead of acting like a grade A dickhead!"

A lecture from a child?! Oh my, is it the 'Pissing Billy Hargrove off' day?! Why everyone can't leave him the fuck alone?!

Billy clenches his jaw and his fists. "Listen, kid…" but he can't continue, maybe luckily, because a sound of steps from the forest suddenly captures their attention. They all go silent and steady.

"What's that?!" Steve freezes and grabs Buckley's arm, like he's on the edge of doing something, some action. "Guys, guys!" Dustin hisses and grabs Billy's arm too, while he immediately incinerates him with a glare. "Sounds like an animal's step." says Max. "Whatever it is… it's coming." notes Lucas, and he's right. They are definitely animals, and they are coming.

Everybody turns towards the point where the beast should appear, brandishing their homemade weapon, ready to fight and kick some asses.
But they all turn out disappointed when a running family of deer cross the railways with a graceful jump. They look at each other, alert, and then everybody burst into a laugh still full of tension and fear.

"Son of a bitch! They were just fucking deer!" Dustin curses, finally stopping clenching Billy's bicep. Steve sighs and runs a hand through his hair. "Geez, that was intense." "Did you piss in your panties, princess?" Billy mocks him, causing an irritated scoff in the other. Lucas is watching him with a confused frown. "Dude, why do you always call him with pet names?" he asks, causing giggles in Robin. "Yeah, why is that, Hargrove?" she agrees. Billy blushes but tries to dissimulate it looking just annoyed by the stupid questions.

Steve, instead, looks the same old dork. "It's our thing, guys. I don't expect you to understand it." he jokes, sounding extremely calm about it. Maybe he is calm because the guy is painfully straight and Billy is just tripping about their weird flirting-teasing game. Steve Harrington is so heterosexual that can make gay jokes without questioning his sexuality.
"Eeew!" Max comments, but she's actually laughing, while Billy feels, once again, his cheeks turning red. "Jesus, you fucking finished there?!" he spats, turning towards the rails and starting to walk again. Everything in order to avoid showing how actually flustered he is.

"Aww, isn't he cute when he's shy?" Steve doesn't really know when to shut up. This time, Billy twists and face him, now visibly upset. "Fuck off, Harrington!" Almost simultaneously to the last insult, a loud metallic screech resonates from the trees near them. This time, it doesn't sound like a bellow, or an animal's voice.
This time, they can't prepare themselves, a creepy, furless creature bolts from the trees, almost catching Billy with its jaws. He makes a jump back, avoiding the attack, and curses between his teeth. The creature roars and makes a few steps ahead.

Billy has seen one of those things the night before, but it has been a lightning, too fast to be seen properly. So he gasps at the sight of the monster, shocked. It's true that the thing resembles vaguely a dog, but it has a creepy mouth with hundreds of teeth, vaguely flower looking.

"Holy shit…" he hisses, paralyzed. Dustin is yelling next to him, and soon other two demodogs appear from the wood, standing threatening in front of them, roaring, looking like they're about to attack.

Billy finally snaps from his reverie, realizing that he's staring at the monster motionless, like a stupid. Steve looks ready to attack, the nailed bat raised.
He's now standing next to him, and Billy realizes that he's talking. Looks like he has noticed Billy's freaking out, and that's kind of embarrassing. "Don't be scared, big boy. We can get them, if we stick together." Billy scoffs, finally recollecting himself. He grabs his bat and imitates Steve's position. "Not scared, pretty boy." Robin joins them, leaving the kids behind.

"What the fuck we're supposed to do, Steve? Waiting for them to attack?" her voice is broken by the anxiety, Billy can tell and honestly, he can't blame her. The three of them are trembling like leaves. It's different, programming to go on muster hunting and being in the real situation.

The demodogs are roaring and screeching, as if they're making them aware that they're about to attack, like how real dogs do. One of them, the one that stays in the center and the one that came there first, snaps towards them. Steve, with irresponsible courage, rushes and launches his bat, almost hitting the thing, that promptly retreats. Steve tries to hit it again, and Billy can see, all of a sudden, is a pure mess, Steve and Robin are waving their bats to the monster, Max, Lucas and Dustin yelling orders end encouragements, and Billy just follows his instinct, some utter guttural feeling tells him to talk and when he does it, his voice doesn't sound his anymore, sounds different, metallic, almost ethereal.

"Back off!"

Steve and Robin freeze in their spot while the demodogs instantly withdraw, and it looks like Starcourt again, the monsters are following his orders, he doesn't know why and how, but he just knows that they have to obey because suddenly, they are him and he is them, their minds are connected in a tumultuous flow of shared consciousness. He just thinks of them attacking themself, and in the exact same moment he's doing that, a demodog rushes towards another and clenches its throat with its sharp jaws, causing a stream of black blood flows from the injured one, in a spectacular, morbid show of raw, animal-like violence.

The hurt demodog falls on the grass and writhes in pain, moving spasmodically its legs, bleeding copiously from its neck. Meanwhile, the third one attacks the other, biting in the same spot, causing the same harsh scene of surrender.

The last one is standing motionless, while Steve, Robin and all the others are staring wordless at the scene. Billy starts to tremble, both his nostril dropping red blood that reaches his upper lip.

Robin recalls Steve to attention, shouting at him. "Steve! Do fucking

something!" and those words are enough to make Steve spring ahead and hit hard the beast with the nailed bat. One, two, three times, the black blood of the beast sprinkles to his polo shirt, his face, his head, until the demodog is collapsing, motionless and breathing less.
Everybody gasps, shocked by the sudden quick fight, still processing what has just happened. Billy feels his strength lessening and falls on his knees, his eyes wide in shock and his breathing accelerated. Max bolts towards him and grabs his shoulder, while he eventually goes sit, falling back on his butt.

"Billy! Billy you're ok?" she's now talking loud in his ear but it sounds distant. He nods, slightly, still staring at the dead monsters and breathing fast, as if he has just run a marathon. Dustin takes off his hat and runs a hand in his brown curls, a gesture that vaguely resembles Steve's. "Holy fucking shit!" Lucas nods, and he's looking at the bodies too, eyes wide and his mouth in a "o" shape.

"Holy fucking shit!" Dustin yells again, this time laughing. Steve extracts the bat from the demodog's skull and twists to face Billy. He bows in front of him and squeezes his shoulder, the one that is not occupied by Max's hand. Billy finally looks at him, with a dumb shocked expression that makes him look more like a lost puppy than his usual self. Steve smiles, full of pride. "You did it, big boy. Looks like our suspects were true in the end." Billy gasps, confuses. "What the fuck are you talking about, Harrington?!" he extends an arm towards the three bodies of the beasts, and his voice sounds acute and broken. "What the fuck was that?! What the fuck is that supposed to mean?!" Steve shrugs, never stop smiling. "Don't know. You tell me. You're the new super hero among us, now."

Billy shoves both hands on his shoulder off, annoyed by the physical contact, and stressfully grabs his hair, taking off his stupid Community Pool hat, leaving it on the dirty grass.
"I don't fucking know what I did! I… I just… shit! That's some freaky Carrie White shit!" he cries, face hidden under his hands, sounding pathetic and distressed. Max gently pats his back, while Dustin feels the need to correct:"Technically speaking, El could be seen more as Carrie White, because she's a psychic and well, she's also a girl. You have Flayers-powers, which I also think that's badass because they open a lot of possibilities If you know how to use them properly…"

Max glares at him, looking up from her spot next to her stepbrother. "Dude, shut up." Lucas punches his friend in the arm, slightly, and it's oddly amusing that he's defending Billy Hargrove.

Billy is still seated with his head hidden under his hands and his hair. He's internally freaking out. Looks like things are becoming stranger and stranger for him, now that he was almost starting to think that he could be more like his usual self. Nope… looks like he has freaking alien power and, yeah, maybe it sounds cool for a nerd kid thirteen years old, but it doesn't for him, he has already too many fucked up problems to deal with, he doesn't want something that scares the hell out of him to be the cherry on the top of that cake of shit.

"Billy…" Steve puts again a hand on his shoulder, and now he's speaking softer. "You did great. You were awesome, really… you saved us all, again." Billy raises his chin, a small flush on his cheeks. Goddamit, even if it is in that kind of context, Steve's praises have a certain effect on him. He wants more. He craves more. He stays silent, waiting for Steve to speak again. "Don't freak out. I know that, discover to have powers must be kind of mindblowing, but you're not alone in this. We will figure it out, right, guys?"

Everybody nods, finally silent and strangely serious. Billy sighs, but he's calmer. He was on the verge of a panic attack, and Steve has been ready to stop it.

"I've got too much to deal on in my life, Harrington…" he hisses, after a while, broking that heavy eye contact with the other. "…I… can't, I can't have also this… freaking power bullshit too…" his voice is shaking again, and Steve tightens his grip on his shoulder. "You don't have to face it alone. You hear me?" Billy, this time, scoffs, mean. "You can't put your trust in people, Harrington. Nobody gives a shit. Everybody is gonna put you down. You should know that, don't you? Or aren't you the one that has still a big boner for the girl who cheated on you? Uh?"

Steve's expression darkens, and bingo! Billy can finally feel the thrills of excitement through his spine. He rudely pushes away his hand and gets on his feet, even it costs a wave of nausea and a blunder.

Steve gets up too, and his expression is severe, his fists clenched, but he's trying to stay collected. "Is this some sort of coping mechanism to avoid your problems, Hargrove? Because we're not talking about me, here." he just says, serious, facing Billy with pride and bravery. "My, my! Psychologist as well, pretty boy?" he licks the encrusted blood on his upper lip, ferine and raw.

"You know what is your problem, Stevie? You're always concerned about the others but you're not able to look at yourself! Don't you fucking understand that in this world there are just two types of people, who eats and who gets eaten? I don't fucking wanna be like you!" Billy's voice becomes more and more ragged, almost desperate. He doesn't know what he's doing and why he is doing it, his mind is blurry, he's seeing red and he is just going with the flow.

"So fucking quit it with all this pathetic freakshow and leave me the fuck alone! We're not in this together, we will never be. I don't want to be friends with you and your bunch of losers. You make me sick." that's a lie. Steve could never make him sick. But he doesn't need to know that. He doesn't need to know anything about what he really thinks of him.
Everybody goes silent. Steve is still looking at him, his expression is unreadable. Then, he just sighs and tells:"We should burn them.", referring to the dead bodies. Billy blinks, surprised. "What?" he asks, dumbly, but Steve is already moving the carcasses in a unique pile, helped by Robin and Lucas.

"I have mom's Brandy." Dustin announces, getting out a fancy bottle from his colorful backpack. Billy wishes he could object to that waist of precious alcohol, but he's still too shocked by the reaction of all the others to his recent outburst. Is like, they are completely ignoring him… but they don't look angry. Being ignored is maybe worse. He stares aside at them, setting the monsters on fire, with a heavy sensation on his chest.

They walk back in silence for a while. It's like, the ugly sensation in the chest of Billy has expanded all over his torso. He feels nauseous, and his walk has become more and more unstable too. Max notices it and grabs his arm. She looks at him concerned, and that concern makes him even more sick, it's annoying, unnerving, why the fuck is she concerned?! He has just treated them like shit. He's a shitty

person. And he likes it! He has no regrets, not at all. He's crazy, they should all fear him, now that he also has freaky super-powers, he's back to be the flayed, dangerous monster Billy again, the one that kidnaps people, that kills people, that…

His train of thoughts is interrupted by the sudden retch that he can't keep back, and in a moment he's on his knees, puking again that horrible black matter, boiling tears are made by the effort.

"Gross!" Dustin comments, but he has vaguely scientific interest, while Max pats on his back and Steve immediately rushes to him, like the good nurse he is, holding back his hair. He stares at the black, definitely non-human vomit: like the previous times it has happened, there are… things that are moving in there. It's creepy and disgusting.
"You ok, buddy?" Harrington gently whisper next to him, still touching the hair and dammit, that's not the context where Billy wishes to have his hair stroked. "Fucking stop pulling my hair like I'm a bitch, Harrington." Billy spats, venomously, his chin dirty with saliva and black liquid, and Steve does that, this time blushing hard. "S…Sorry! Didn't mean to!" Billy groans, while Dustin approaches them and points to the black puke. "GUYS!!" he yells with too high octaves. "Dart!!"

Lucas throws his arms in the air, exasperated. "What?!" Dustin speaks with smugness. "Dart looked like this. And Will, Will puked a slug too! Don't you understand?! All those demodogs have been expelled by Billy! We need to kill them!"

"Wait, wait, wait a minute!" Steve shouts, shocked. "You're telling me that Will has… puked a demodog?!" Dustin rolls his eyes and pinches the bridge of his nose. "Yes, Steve. Not literally, they born like larva. Little slugs."

Billy cleans his chin rubbing it with the back of his hand, and now he's really looking shuttered. "That's fucking disgusting." "Billy." Steve turns to him, all serious and concerned. "Is this the first time this… vomit thing happens?" Billy shallows, diverting his look, uneasy. "Nope. It happened before." "WHAT?!" everybody shouts in unison, and that day can't get any more embarrassing.

"Wait a minute, so, you puked black slugs and you didn't tell anything to anyone?" Robin asks, lifting an eyebrow in her trademark skeptical frown. Billy groans, getting on his feet. "Sorry, Buckley, if I don't go around telling the people that I'm fucking puking gross alive stuff! Is that impossible to believe?!"
"How much? When?" Max asks, pensive. Billy sighs and slides a hand on his face. "First time st the Byers. Not much after I woke." "WHAT?!" "…then in my room. Then at the Pool's toilet. That all."

"Shit, shit, shit…" Dustin starts to walk nervously, up and down, trying to think about a solution. "They might as well be dozens of grown up demodogs! They grow fast, very fast. I know that because it just happened that I adopter one." now is Billy's turn for being shocked. "What the fuck, kid?! That thing?!" "It was a puppy, alright? And Dart was vegetarian. He was a good boy." "Guys, guys…" Lucas urges, anxious. "There's no time for this!"

Steve, once again, decides to be the hero of the situation. "Let's burn the larva. Then we will get rid of the others… and from now on, no more secrets, Big Boy." he tells the last words to Billy, who scoffs, annoyed.

They end up burning the black mass of puke and slugs, while Billy's mind feels drained and blank, too stressed and overwhelmed. That day started decently, and now looks like a real nightmare. The problem is, it isn't finished yet.

"What now?" he asks Harrington, while they resume their walk towards the cars. Steve shrugs. "We go to the Byers. We'll see what we can do." Billy sighs, and he can actually feel Steve's doe sympathetic eyes on him. "You ok?" he asks, sounding honestly worried, and Billy can't blame him cause he knows that he must be looking like a wreck, and feels too. He doesn't say anything in response. Steve's mouth sags in a small smile. "I guess not." he says, making Billy shiver at all that kindness, all that interest. Why is he still nice? He insulted him. He insulted them all.

"Sorry for being an asshole." Billy spats hastily. Steve blinks in surprise, then he smirks and throws an arm on his shoulder. "You can't apologize for being yourself." he jokes. Billy sighs. "Maybe you're right." "Hey…" Steve stops and squeezes his shoulder,

searching for his eye contact. "…I get it. You were upset. It’s ok. What I said is still valid, we’re in this shit together and we stick together. We’re gonna solve it. Promise."

Billy looks at him, uncertain, feeling the fucking butterflies in his stomach like the little fairy boy he is. Steve is so convincing, with that confidence. He might believe him. They stare at each other for a long moment, then the sound of someone clearing their voice collects their attention, making them snap from their reverie.

Yeah, they kind of tend to forget the presence of everyone else in those moments.

"Cute, guys. Shall we go? It’s getting darker and colder." Robin complains, making them break the eye contact and continue their walking in silence, flushed and thoughtful.

8. I hate this pain

Summary for the Chapter:

Rendez vous & Solitaire

They eventually gathered at the Byers' home, for Billy's discomfort. That place has been the center of some of his recent most unpleasing experiences.

Dustin explained how they had found and killed three demodogs, how apparently Billy had been able to maneuver them with his undiscovered mind power, causing curiosity in the others.

"So, you just… thought of them killing each other's, and then…. They were suddenly at each other's throats?" Nancy has asked, her big eyes frowning in a focused expression. Billy sighed, once in a time not liking to be the center of the attention, his arms leaning loosely at the back of the coach and his legs rudely spread wide. "For the last time, Wheeler… I don't know what I've done. It was fast, I didn't plan anything, it just happened." he spoke with venom, giving her a particularly nasty glare, but she didn't seem concerned at all.

Then, the tricky part came: the puking alien creatures thing. Billy would have preferred to throw himself off the quarry instead of revealing a so disgusting and embarrassing thing, but the others have been all comprehensive and judging free, to his relief. Most of all, they looked scientifically interested in a so strange phenomenon.

"So, we have several growing up demodogs running free." Mike recaps. "At least a dozen." confirms Dustin, who's taking notes like a good scholar. "How do we know he's not lying?!" Wheeler junior snaps, clearly not convinced. "How do we know he's not flayed?!" "Seriously, Mike? This again?!" Max rolls her eyes, instinctively getting nearer to her stepbrother on the coach, causing his annoyance because goddamit, he doesn't need a fucking thirteen years old girl defending him!

Mike gets angrier and jumps on his feet, waving a hand towards Billy who is still extremely calm, despite the situation. "Why are you

defending him, Max?! You hate him!" Max jumps on her feet, standing in front of him with her fists clenched. "Don't assume to know shit about me, about us!" she yells, and wow, they're 'us', now, apparently. Wheeler junior doesn't give up. "I know that he fucking tried to kill El!" "How many times, Mike?! He was flayed! It's not his fault, you should hate Will as well if being possessed by an alien monster is chargeable!" "Don't you dare put Will in this, Max!"

They continue to yell, loud. Billy facepalms, feeling the pounding of a headache growing up. "Jesus, they're noisy." he hisses between his teeth, causing the chuckles of Steve, who's sitting next to him. "I hear that." "Do they ever shut up?" "Never, dude." "God…" he exhales a long breath.
The fight eventually fades thanks to Nancy and Joyce. Will can finally timidly take the floor. "I have a theory…" he starts, his voice low and his shoulder tense. Billy decides that Will Byers is his favorite one in the crowd of the brats. Because he's the silent type, and it's good for his ears.
Joyce motherly encircles his shoulders. "Go on, sweetie…"

"…After I was flayed I had been still upset for a while. It's like… you gain back your old self gradually. The Mind Flayer stays with you, in your brain, in your thoughts…" Will is looking straight at Billy now, with his huge eyes. "…I think that Billy has been a better host than me. Stronger, more resistant…" Mike scoffs, like admitting Billy's so-called 'strength' is too much to bear. Will looks away, blushing slightly. "…I think… I've been thinking… maybe Billy is not flayed anymore, has his control back, but there's still some Mind Flayer in him… his… his body is struggling to get it out. They're, like, toxins…"

The kid is not wrong.; Billy thinks. Clearly Mike and Lucas don't agree, they look quite skeptical. "So what, Will? You think he's still possessed but… conscious?" asks Wheeler junior, smugly, and damn Billy wishes he could punch in the face that little annoying bitch. Dustin points an index in the air, enlightened. "You guys! You guys! Will's right… he's like… Spiderman!"

Steve and Billy burst into a laugh, tilting back their heads, and it's

quite incredible how both their reactions are coordinated. Robin, sitting on the armrest of the coach, gives them an amused gaze, smirking slightly.

"Oh my god… what the fuck are they saying now…" Billy speaks between the giggles. Dustin completely ignores them, continuing undeterred in his lecture. "Peter Parker gained power after being bitten by the spider. It's the same here, guys." El, who has stayed silent and pensive all the time, blinks in stupor. "Billy has been bitten by a spider?" she asks, clearly confused. Mike gently grabs her hand and talks like a birdie in love. "No, El, they're talking about Spiderman, the comic… I've read it to you, remember?" "So, this power is inherited…" speaks Byers senior, thoughtfully. "Why Billy and not Will?" "Because, Billy was the perfect host. He's muscular, resilient, tanned, and basically an asshole!" Dustin explains smugly, and at these words Billy groans. What does 'tanned' have to do with all the possession thing anyway?! And why are they fucking talking about him like he isn't even there?!

He puts his hands on his knees and sprang to his feet. "Enough nonsense. I'm off for a smoke, shitheads." he announces, resolute.
He really needs some fresh air and fresh nicotine to clear his mind. That day has been beyond fucked up and being there, talking about his alleged 'super powers' with a bunch of nerds and losers is giving him a headache.

He sits on the porch and lights one, and it doesn't take long for Steve to come. Billy smirks at his arrival, he had the feeling that the boy would have followed him. Honestly, it's what Billy had wanted in the beginning.

"Can I bum one?" asks the brunette. Billy reaches the pocket and grins, then lights up Steve's cigarette with his lighter, from his hands, as he does with the chicks.
Steve takes a long drag and then puffs a cloud of smoke that fades into the darkness. Billy is staring at him, predatory, and the guy is clearly avoiding eye contact. He pats the space next to him on the bench. "Sit down, princess, I'm not gonna bite." Steve chuckles, he looks nervous, but he does what he is told.
"Yeah, after all, you're the one that has been bitten by the spider." he jokes, causing a theatrical roll of eyes in Billy. "Fuck... stop talking

nerd, you too. Those brats are dangerous to you, King Steve." "I've been out of my crown for a while, Hargrove. Someone dethroned me." Billy grins, apparently satisfied by that response, and takes another drag, moving to sit exaggeratedly near Steve.

"After all… this Hawkins school bullshit is over, for me. I'm a peasant working-class man, aren't I?" Steve points out, and in that moment Billy remembers, snapping almost dumbly on his seat.

"Today was your first day!" Steve genuinely smiles. "Something like that. You remembered, I'm flattered, Hargrove." Billy scoffs, but turns slightly his head to hide the light flush in his cheeks. "Don't get too cocky Harrington. I was planning to go to your workplace to give you shit in front of the ladies." that's, obviously, a lie. Steve doesn't need to know that.

"That's cute. Thinking about me a lot recently, aren't you, Billy Boy?" Billy snorts, but stays silent, causing a small laugh in the other boy. "You can always come by tomorrow. It's kind of shit, the owner is an asshole and basically hates my guts for the whole 'King Steve' thing…" "Even if now you're a loser that hangs out with a bunch of nerds." Steve doesn't deny that, instead, he laughs, openly and amused. "I know!" they both giggles, looking away towards the open road, taking a drag from their cig.
It's so strange how Billy can feel both relaxed and alert with him. Joking with the guy feels so natural, and he can't deny that Steve is funny, among a lot of other things; beautiful, hot, cute, kissable… ugh. He really doesn't need to take that train of thoughts.

"At least I don't have to wear that sailor's costume anymore." Steve sighs, after a while.

Billy's blood runs cold. Yeah, he saw Steve in that ridiculous, cute, insanely sexy outfit. He was out with a nameless chick at the mall. He had purposely avoided Scoops Ahoy from that day on, because Steve in that sailor suit was too much to bear, and he didn't want the flash of that during his jerking off session. Moreover, that was the period where he and Steve were basically avoiding talking or even acknowledge the existence of each other, so he didn't want to feel a pathetic queer that has fantasy on a guy that hates his guts.
"You ok? You look strange." Steve draws his attention, and Billy

instantly recollects himself and puts his trademark grin on his face. "That's a shame. I'm sure that the ladies were thrilled by your sailor boy outfit." the brunette scoffs. "Not much, honestly. I think that being the blond, tanned lifeguard of the Pool gives much more possibilities, actually." "You were never there." Billy spats, without control, sounding almost petulant. Steve blinks, clearly not expecting this response. He smirks. "Disappointed, Hargrove?" Billy snorts, trying to look not interested with too much effort. "Like I give a shit."

"I was avoiding you."

Damn. That sounds like a big admission. A big admission of… acknowledgment? Like Steve actually acknowledged his existence? Billy thought he was no one to Steve. Not even a bother. Not even a danger.
He extinguishes the cigarette and immediately lights another one. He's nervous.

"You were scared, Harrington?"

Steve rubs the back of his neck, chuckling lightly. "Maybe. I don't know. Besides, I'm not a big fan of pools." that's kind of a strange statement. "Why?" Steve squirms on his seat, uncomfortable. Looks like he has hit a sore point. This must be one of the other skeletons in his closet.

"It's a long story." he spats after a while, avoiding eye contact. Doesn't look like he wants to share his traumas. "You don't trust me." another time, Billy is unable to stop his fucking big mouth. Another time, he sounds like a damn offended pussy. He wishes he could punch himself.

Steve smiles and finally puts his eyes on him. Those big, beautiful brown eyes. And they're not full of disgust, they're not full of hate, there's something else there, a glow, something indefinite that continues to appear in his look. "I trust you." he talks slow, and Billy feels his breath come less and his heart racing up. "I'm here with you, aren't I? And you practically broke my face." his voice is sweet, calm, but those words give Billy the heebie-jeebies. He gasps, feeling stupid, feeling the heat on his cheeks.
"I would never…" his voice comes out like a whisper, broken. Steve is

still smiling, still looking at him with that strange light in his eyes.

"I know."
The movement is sudden, but soft. He moves his hand and squeezes Billy's, who feels a wave of dizziness, a blunder that strikes his head and leaves him cold and breathless.
"…I know." Steve repeats, and it's a whisper this time, his hand is still on Billy's and he's gently caressing his palm with his thumb, delicate. Billy shivers and feels like a twelve-year-old fucking girlie, freaked out by a fucking hand, a fucking hand on his.

He raises his sight from the point of contact to Steve, mute, trying to understand the other guy's expression. Does a straight dude take his friends' hands? Is that normal? Is he tripping out about nothing?

He can't solve that question, a noise catches their attention and in a moment their hands are separated, leaving a burning sensation where Billy's skin had encountered Steve's. Max is on the doorjamb, and she looks somehow uncomfortable.

She saw us.

Us. There's no us. It's not that she has seen shit. Why does she ever be the one that witnesses those kinds of stuff?

She clears her voice. "Joyce is making pasta. She asked if we're staying for dinner." she explains, pointing a thumb towards the house, casually.
Billy sprang on his feet. "We're not. In fact, we're going, Maxine. It's late and I really wish not to run into Neil and your mum explaining where the fuck we have been." Max frowns, disappointed. "But…"
"End of discussion. Say hello to everyone and get your ass in the car."
Billy looks for his keys in his pockets, than he remembers that he's car-less and curses loud.

"I can give you guys a ride." Steve smirks, apparently very amused by the situation. Billy huffs, surrendered, moving back some curls from his cheeks. "Fine." he spats, like that's a huge admission. "But don't get used to it too much. We're not your charity case, Harrington."
"Ok, I'm going back to greet everyone!" Max announces cheerfully, grabbing the door jamb. She makes a step, then stops, pensive. "Billy,

don’t you want to say hello to the others before we go?"

Billy groans. "No, Maxine, I don’t give a shit to say hello to your shitty friends!" "Alright, alright, jeez…" she storms away. Steve chuckles.
"What’s so funny, Harrington?" Billy’s voice is less threatening than how he would have liked it, but still venomous enough. Steve raises his hands in surrender.
"You two guys are cute."

He pushes Steve, playfully but maybe putting too much strength in the gesture.
"Oh, fuck off, princess."

They eventually got home before Neil and Susan, for Billy’s relief. He made a quick shower in order to get the stink of vomit and sweat off and made sandwiches for him and Max.
Of course, the nosy brat had to put her nose into his business.

"So… how is it going with Steve?" she asks casually, taking a bite of her sandwich while absently watching TV. Billy makes a face, annoyed. "None of ya." "I saw you guys holding hands." "Bullshit." "Billy, come on…"

That’s embarrassing. They weren’t fucking holding hands. Well, they were, but he can’t admit something like that to his stepsister. Holding hands is for pussies and he must maintain some cool points after all.

"Max." he speaks seriously, finally facing the small redhead. "This is serious shit. You can’t talk about this stuff. You understand?" she rolls her eyes. "Jesus, Billy. We’re just us in this room. It’s ok. You know I’m happy for you guys." "There’s nothing to be happy of."

The little shit smirks all devilish and clever. "Come on. He’s always staring at you, his eyes are like… glowing or something."
Billy swallows, looking dumbly at his half-eaten sandwich, the TV still running in background.
"Is he?" he asks, almost a whisper. God! He sounds so stupid. So fucking faggy.

Max burst into a laugh. "He's sooo into you and it's so obvious! Like, what the fuck was all that weird flirting thing today? Gross. You looked like a couple, seriously. Even Lucas was weirded out." Those words make Billy snaps, alert. "What did he say to you?" Max recognizes the awe in the boy's voice. "Nothing. You don't have to worry, I'm serious." Billy tries to sound threatening, but he isn't sure if he succeeds. "You better be, shitbird. Keep your mouth shut."
A long, pensive pause of silence follows by. Max breaks it after a while.

"You know… that I never meant to snitch on you. Back in Cali…"

That's kind of a tricky topic. Billy has hated Max for so long, blaming her for their forced transfer there in bumfuck Hawkins. But, truth is, he used to be angry all the time, with everyone and everything. He stopped hated her. He was angry with himself, his bad luck, the ton of shit that his life constantly gives to him.

"I know." he exhales, tired.
"You know… I kinda liked Nathan. Even if he had been an asshole to you. He was soo cool! He taught me how to skate."
Billy feels his blood boil at the mention of the guy. Too many unpleasant memories float in his mind, and he cannot control the train of thoughts that reminds him of Nathan's long, smooth light-brown hair, his smell, his sharp, acute voice. His stupid, skater hat. The wrecked, baggy jeans, his collection of flannel shirts, of metal bands black t-shirts. It's a spiral of images and sensation and feels distant, muffled, underwater.

Can anyone love and hate so much a person at the same time? Their story has never been easy, romantic, sweet. They were a fucking storm, it was a constant alternate through fights and sex. They were both psychopaths. Angry, hurt, searching for an easy escape from the pain.

He had discovered everything with Nathan. He had discovered himself. He's being a faggot. He thought that he had found a partner in crime, in his shitty war against the world. Instead, he had found a fucking lying asshole, a manipulative piece of shit. Another manipulative piece of shit. Another person that had lied, making him believe shit.

His regret is not to have beat the shit out of the guy when he had the chance. But also, the bitter thing is that he misses him. He can't help it. He puts so much effort in hating the guy, but in the very end there's a part of him that is still… affectionate. What a stupid thing to think.

"It doesn't matter. It's the past. Besides, he's dead for me." there's so much poison in Billy's voice that almost scares Max. She gives him a gaze full of pain, empathy. But how can she know? She's just a kid. She can't understand those kinds of shit.

"I'm so sorry." she hisses, staring again at her sandwich. She looks on the verge to cry.
"Whatever, Max. We're here in this shithole. No need to cry on spilled milk."
She smiles, sweet and uncertain. "Yeah." a single, uncontrolled tear drops from her right eye. Billy wants to laugh.
Why is she fucking crying now?

Neil has nothing to reproach him when he gets home with his wife. He even spats something like 'good job, son', causing a mixed filling of bitterness and disgust in Billy's guts.
Finally, he crashes the bed, exhausted from that long and impossible day. It has been really intense, too many things happened, and his mind is kind of fuzzy. He doesn't know what the worst is: him being dragged in monster hunting, him using his 'Flayer power' on monsters from the Upside-Down, Steve fucking hold his hand, or the recent conversation with Max.

Jeez, he really needs to jerk off. He languidly reaches a hand over his waistband, his mind instantly flooded with Steve's eyes, the smell of his cologne, the soft sensation on his skin on his. He wants him so bad, he wants to taste every inch of him, wants to hear his name whispered on the pretty boy's mouth, low and filthy.

He slowly strokes himself imaging the boy's hands on him. He's too horny to be ashamed of himself, of his burning, forbidden desire.

That's not enough. Billy slows the movement and turns towards the bedside table. There's some lube in the last drawer, hidden under a

pile of dirty magazines. He hasn't done it since he got there, in that shithole town. Too much. Too prohibited for his own sick brain.

But, here's the thing. Fuck that. Fuck everything.

He lets a strangled moan when he presses the first finger inside him. How would Steve take him? Would he take him from behind, fucking him breathless and desperate? He does look more like the kind of a guy who wants to make love, whispers all sweet, dirty things in the ear. That would be foreign for Billy. But, god… he wants that.

He reaches his climax with the intoxicating image of the boy all over him.

Notes for the Chapter:

From now on, things will get... frisky

9. Take a walk on the wild side

Summary for the Chapter:

They finally solve.

Notes for the Chapter:

This chapter is HUGE... I hope you enjoy :)

Warning: internalized homophobia, again, because Steve is a dork.

"I fucked up."

Steve sighs, resting his head on the counter, messy hairs all over the surface. Robin is sitting next to him, absently reading a Steven King's book. "Yeah?" she asks, without any trace of enthusiasm. Steve theatrically sighs again and slightly turns his head to face to girl. "Yeah, Robin. I fucked up. He's not gonna talk to me anymore."

Robin rolls her eyes. Because, of course, they are talking about Billy Hargrove, Steve's brand-new obsession. "Stevie. Why would he do that?"
"You don't understand. I've got a dick." Steve complains, and Robin can't avoid groaning, annoyed. "No shit, dingus." "I've got a dick…" the brunette continues, rising from his position, a stupid thoughtful expression on his face, like he's doing some deep reasoning in his head. "…And he's like, the straightest dude that I've ever seen. I must have imagined things. Misunderstood his behavior."

This time, Robin slams her book on the counter. "Steve." she says, sounding severe. "Please, please stop whit this whine! I told you, he's so into you that is almost unnerving. He has, like the biggest boner ever for you." "You think so?" and god, Steve's voice is high pitched and pathetic. He has reached the bottom for this dude. "I think so."
"Yesterday I took his hand."

At this confession, Robin blinks in shock. An old man enters the shop, but he's completely ignored by them, too absorbed in their

conversation.
"And…?" the girl urges him, after a silent pause full of suspense. Steve groans, apparently irritated by his friend's stupidity. "I don't know! He looked kinda freaked out." Robin scoffs. "Because he thinks that you're the one that is the straightest dude ever." "How do you know that?!" she snaps her fingers in Steve's face. "Heello? I'm gay myself."
Steve stares at her, then he crosses his arms on the counter, all pensive. "I still like tits." he mumbles. Robin sighs and grabs her book back. "You can like both." "Dick and tits?" "Yup. It's called bisexuality." "Like Bowie?" "Yeah, like Bowie, dumbass."

Steve rubs his chin. "I thought that was… Dunnno. Some kind of phase?" jeez, if he wouldn't be her friend, Robin would be tempted to punch him. "You're so homophobic, Steve." he laughs nervously. "How can I be homophobic and jerkin off a guy at the same time?!"
Robin flushes violently and hits him hard on the shoulder with her book. "Gross! You don't have to share everything with me, dork!" "What? I'm still a teenager, I'm always horny, Robin!"

"Hem-hem."
The old man customer clears his voice, standing in front of him, a contemptuous look on his face. He rudely puts three VHS on the counter, glaring at them.
Steve scans them without enthusiasm. Then, he greets the man with fake cordiality.
"Thanks for choosing us, see you soon, sir!"
The guy walks away mumbling something.

"Look…" Steve resumes the discussion, like he hasn't just had an embarrassing scene. Robin kind of admires his dorkiness. "…What if our suppositions are wrong? What if I make a move and then he laughs at me? What if he punches me?!"

Again, Robin rolls her eyes. "That's not gonna happen, dingus." then, she looks at the big windows that face the road, recognizing a truck in the act of parking, loud metal music blasting from the speakers. "But why don't you find out? Your Cali boy is here."

Steve snaps on the seat, taken by surprise. "Shit! How do I look? How is the hair?" Robin grins and pushes him. "You're so fucking stupid."

she says that as a statement, and Steve just shrugs in response, like, he can't really deny that.

Billy enters the shop slamming the door, a wolfish grin plastered in his face, dressed to perfection in his tightest pair of denim, biker boots, Rayban glasses and a shirt unbuttoned to the navel. Anyone presents in the shop turns towards him, like he's a damn Rockstar. Max comes out behind him, waving cheerfully at Steve and Robin, but the first one is too busy staring the guy from up to button, biting his lip nervously, looking a lot like Missis Wheeler.

Billy stalks to the counter and slams his palms to the surface, leaning forward in his incredibly tight jeans. He takes off the glasses and glares right at Steve and, quickly, at Robin.
"Well, well, well. Harrington and Buckley all professional on their second day of job. You guys are adorable."

"If you have complaints, Hargrove, you need to talk to the manager." Steve smirks and challenges him, leaning with his elbow on the counter until his face is close to the boy's. "Oh, no, no complaints, princess." Billy's talking in the dirties and flirtatious tone of his repertory, making Robin rolls her eyes. These guys are so ridiculous.

"Billy, can we take some VHS?" Max asks, breaking their usual staring contest. Finally, Billy leans back and puts his hands on his hips. "You know we don't have a recorder, shitbird." Max smirks. "Well, Lucas does." Steve widens his eyes in surprise, curious about the possible reaction of Billy at those words. But the guy looks calm, almost bored. "Whatever. Don't pick horror movies, otherwise you'll piss your panties." Max reddens. "GROSS!" then she runs away, checking the tapes on the shelves.

"Mister Hargrove, you need to be registered to benefit from our service." Steve jokes, moving a paper on the counter. Billy smirks and licks his lips. "I think I'll do that. I could benefit from your service… several times." he moves the paper keeping firm eye contact with Steve. Robin shakes her head, half amused half pissed by their awkward flirting. Gosh. Hargrove is such a macho cliché.

Billy hastily watches the paper, then he lifts his sight, patting his chin, thoughtful. "Could I benefit from a pen or I have to fulfill it

with blood, pretty boy?" Steve laughs nervously and bends down to get a pen behind the counter, making the pen holder and some folders fall.
"Yeah… gimme a second." he tells, fixing his mess. Robin facepalms and Billy giggles. "I got all the time in the world, Stevie."

Billy quickly fills the form with his rough writing. Robin reads it, genuinely curious. "I knew you were a Scorpio!" she states, with a smirk. "What makes you think so?" Billy purrs, slightly tilting his head. "It's, like, the worst sign in the entire zodiac, Hargrove." she spats. "Aggressive, passional, instinctual, kind of drama-queens…" "… Yeah, not that bad." Billy objects.

Robin turns to Steve. "Your birthday is in July… isn't it?" he nods. Billy scoffs, derisive. "Yeah, of course you're a fucking Cancer. A bleeding heart like you could only be a Cancer." Steve is genuinely surprised by Billy's interest and knowledge of zodiac signs.

Billy turns to Robin, pointing lazily at her. "Let me guess. Deep, silent type, smartass, but full of discomfort…" she gasps, this time caught by surprise. Is Hargrove psychoanalyzing her?! That's low. "…you must be a Sagittarius." he states in the end, and she can't hide her shock. "Am I right, sweetheart?" Robin scoffs. "Don't call me that, Hargrove. But yes. Good catch."

He grins, satisfied and wolfishly, and pats on the counter. "I knew that!" Steve shrugs, confused. "I don't get these zodiac bullshits. Sounds pretty lame to me." "Speaks the boy who plays D&D with a bunch of kids." Billy retorts, maliciously, causing a little, uncontrolled laugh in Robin. Steve flushes and gasps. "I don't play D&D with them! They say I'm too stupid to understand the rules of the game. Like I give a shit."

Billy and Robin look at themselves for a moment, then, they burst into a laugh at the same time. Maybe Robin had judged the guy too quick… he's actually… not that bad. He's not as stupid and superficial as he wants to appear.

"Steve, you're practically telling us that you have been snubbed by them." Robin says between the laughs. Steve starts to stutter. "*Snubbed*! No, no! What a big word, naahh…" the boy can't go on

with his stuttering babbling, a customer calls his attention.

"Young boy, would you mind help me here?" she calls him, and Steve rushes to her, suddenly called by his responsibilities.

Robin archives the paper and takes off a card where she writes Billy's name on it. "Why did you say that I'm 'full of discomfort', Hargrove?" she asks casually, hiding her sincere interest. "I recognize a complex mind when I see one. You and I are not so different." he answers, surprisingly frank. Robin scoffs. "Me and you? You're such a macho bullshit walking cliché, Hargrove."

To her surprise, he just laughs at that, not looking offended at all. "And you-" Billy points to her, leaning at the counter, suddenly all serious, "-Are a smartass that hides her disease under snarky comments. You can't fool me, Buckley. There's chaos in that little blondie head of yours, I can tell it. You're just more discrete in hiding that."
She reaches the card to him. "Maybe you right." she admits, looking at Steve, a few meters away, intent on facing an old lady's complaint. Billy grabs the card and put it in his leather wallet. Then, he rudely lets fall ten bucks to the counter to pay the rental.

"I like you, Buckley. Seriously, you're not that bad." he says, smirking, and Robin can't really tell if he's ironic or not. "Oh, yeah? I think you like Steve more than me." these words have the power to take Billy by surprise, making him gasps like a fish, a confused frown on his face. He collects himself eventually, looking serious all of a sudden.
"I like you. But you should be careful when you talk to shit you don't know." he hisses, venomous. Robin grins and make a gesture to him, telling him silently to come closer. He does so. "Or maybe you're not the only one in the closet, Hargrove." she whispers, making him drawback in surprise. The expression on Billy's face is supreme: he looks shocked, concerned and confused at the same time. To Robin, that's very satisficing.

They can't continue the strange conversation, Max appears from nowhere with three VHS with her, and it looks like she's perceiving their strange tense vibes, because she hastily turns from Robin to Billy, a confused frown on her face.

"Are you guys ok?" she asks, raising an eyebrow. "Brilliant." Robin chirps, grabbing the VHS and scanning them without interrupting the eye contact with Billy, who's now squirming on his spot, uneasy and exposed. He hasn't denied his "being in the closet", so that's totally a victory for Robin.

He ends sliding a hand to his face, gripping his blonde curls, absent-mindedly. "Yeah, ok." he turns towards Max. "We should go. My shift starts soon."
Robin smirks and reaches the VHS, put in a pile. "Yeah, good talk, Hargrove. Come back soon. But I'm sure you'll do."
Billy grabs the tapes and scoffs. "Yeah, I will. Thanks, sweetheart." he storms out after a last, nasty glare, followed by the small trotting redhead.

Steve rushes back to the counter and looks at the truck disappearing away, cursing between his teeth. "Geez, he went away without saying hi to me!" he complains, disappointed. Robin responds with a shrug. "You know him. I think he kind of likes this type of approach, catch-me-if-you-can." Steve exhales and rest in his cheek on the palm of his hand, looking all contemplative and desperately infatuated. "Yeah. I guess he likes to be chased."

Robin looks at him, pensive. Geez. The guy really needs to get his shit together. They both have to solve their ridiculous sexual tension thing. Robin playfully pushes her friend, now determined to encourage him.

"You know what? Go for it, Stevie!"
The guy blinks. "What?" "Make a damn move. Ask him out, stick your tongue into his mouth and see what he will do." Now Steve is really shocked, but in a good way. "Is it that simple?" he asks, amused. Robin shrugs, her trademark smirk plastered on her face. "Is it, dingus?"

The sound of the door opening catches her attention. A couple enters the shop, one is a tall and muscular dude with short, brown hair that corresponds to the perfect walking cliché of the stereotype of the jock. The other person… is a redhead girl with big, green eyes, cute freckles on her cheeks, and a smile that is too nice to be on a cheerleader.

Steve, at their sight, rolls his eyes. "Oh, gosh. Not them." Robin swallows. Yeah, she recognizes them. It's Chris Robinson, captain of the Hawkins high football team, and Elizabeth Miller, his girlfriend and, obviously, one in the cheerleader team. Too stereotyped to be real. But yet… Robin knows Elizabeth, not much, but she's nice. They had few classes together, she has always been kind to her, she's actually a smart person to talk with.

Robin remembers Elizabeth's poetry in English classes. She was deep, artistic, in a way that you wouldn't expect from a cheerleader. Such a shame that she's with one of the most idiotic, misogynistic jocks in the world, that punctually treats her like shit.
Steve presses his palms on the counter and talks loud and falsely cheerful. "Hey guys, fancy seeing you here! Looking for a movie night? We have the vastest assortment of romantic movies in Indiana in this Video Store."

Chris grins, sinking his hands into the pockets of his jeans. "Harrington. I heard you were working at the mall, dressing like a fag pirate. Didn't expect to find you here."
Steve just lifts an eyebrow, not touched. "Well, clearly there's no mall where to work to, dude. Sorry to disappoint you buddy, you lost the chance to see me as that 'gay pirate' costume that gave you so much to think about."

Robin can't keep back a small laugh, while Chris groans, irritated. "You think you're funny, Harrington? What? Fucking the Wheeler chick for a while made you a smartass now?"
These words finally hit a nerve. Steve clenches his fist and tightens his jaw, in a poor attempt to holding back the punch that is itching in his hands. Luckily, Elizabeth grips her boyfriend's bicep, trying to cool him off.

"Leave them alone, Chris… they're just working." she hisses. He glares at them in a way that makes Robin's blood boil, then he shoves her off and scoffs. Elizabeth ignores him, probably used to be publicly treated by shit, and makes a small smile to Robin. "I was thinking… do you have 'The Breakfast Club'? I know is kind of new, but…" "Oh my god!" Robin snaps on her seat, excited. "I love 'The Breakfast Club'!" at this information, Elizabeth giggles shyly and moves a lock behind her ear. "Really? That's cool…"

Robin smirks and gets off the seat, walking around the counter to reach them. "Finally, someone with decent taste in movies. I'm tired to assist people that ask me about Rambo and Rocky all the time."

She spends the next ten minutes suggesting movies to Elizabeth that is surprisingly very acculturated. Chris is glaring at them aside with pure hate. He eventually gets tired to wait for his girlfriend and complains like a five-years-old child. Elizabeth, after a small, almost imperceptible sigh, announces that she has to go and cheerfully greets Robin.

Steve is looking at the point where the couple is disappeared when he talks, sounding bored. "Assholes." he spats, without enthusiasm. "She's actually pretty nice." Robin objects, almost sheepishly. Steve snaps to her, an amused frown on his big eyes. "You like her? Like, *like* her?!" Robin scoffs and rolls her eyes dramatically.
"No. No absolutely no! Not everything revolves around gay sexual attraction, Steven!" but Steve smirks maliciously and 'boop' her nose. "You like her! I can see that, don't lie to me, silly girl!"

She pushes him, playfully. Steve is wrong. Not everything revolves around gay sexual attraction.

Billy is, like, zero surprised to find Steve waiting for him outside the Pool at the end of his shift. In fact, he is so not surprised that this time he had had the care to take a good change of clothes with him for the afterwork.

He stands, smirking maliciously in his tightest pair of jeans, hair still damp, a thumb hooking the belt loop and his duffel bag on his shoulder. Steve is leaning on the Beemer, arm crossed, glaring at him casually in his 'player mode' and god if Billy is not thinking that he looks so fucking adorable. Steve doesn't say anything, just smirks, all cocky and confident. The air between them is buzzing in pure electricity.

Billy is honestly excited to find him, there, waiting for him. But it's not that he can show it, it would be too easy. He must act with nonchalance. They are both acting. They are both idiots, after all.

They stare at each other for an embarrassing amount of time, then Billy finally breaks it.
"Am I dreaming or is that you, Harrington?"

Steve laughs, tilting his head back, showing his pale neck, making his adam's apple bobbling slightly, and Billy wants to sink his teeth in it so bad. Jesus, Harrington is gonna be his downfall. Just seeing the guy there is making his cock twitch in interest, and that's quite impressive.

"Yeah, it's me, don't cream your pants." Steve retorts. Billy scoffs and lights up a cigarette, slowly, like he has all the time in the world. He sucks a long drag and then, without saying anything, he opens the backdoor of Beemer, slams his duffel bag on the backseat and sits ahead.

Steve blinks in shock, then he sits on the driver's seat, confused and excited at the same time. Billy is smoking, leaning languidly, relaxed. Steve starts the engine, slow and careful.

"You're not gonna ask me what I'm doing here or where are we going?" he asks, confused. Billy looks at him, a wolfish grin plastered on his face. Steve looks beautiful, like usual. No, maybe better than usual. Steve looks perfect. He's too much for him and Billy isn't sure how long he will be able to keep his hands off him. But he has the impression that tonight is the night, Steve sparks with a new kind of confidence, maybe the guy is tired too to play their game, maybe he craves some real action.

Billy purrs in the best, flirty tone. "Just drive, pretty boy."
Steve makes a face, "Yessir.", and does what he's been told. A soft, nice tune spreads out from the speaker, Billy instantly recognizes it and turns up the volume.

Hey Baby, take a walk on the wild side…

"That my mixtape?" he asks, casually, even if he knows that yes, it's his mixtape and Steve was listening to it so he appreciates it and it's mad how something so small and ridiculous gives Billy a thrill.

"Yup." Steve answers, popping the 'p' and doing an incredibly nasty

U-turn. "It’s actually pretty nice. Kinda old school rock or something. Didn’t take you as the sensitive type, Hargrove." Billy grimaces and talks back maliciously. "I could surprise you in many ways, King Steve." the other boy giggles. "You’re the worst." "You like it."
Ops. Billy couldn’t fucking restrain his tongue. Is it too much? Steve blinks, surprised. But just for a moment. "Maybe I do."

Geez. Billy has to face the window to hide the stupidest smirk on his face. He feels like a little girl, wet pussy but he can’t help it. Steve fucking Harrington is so intoxicating. It’s a new kind of intoxication. It’s not that he has so many comparisons, his only sort of boyfriend has been Nathan in San Diego, and their story had been the worst fucked up thing in history. But Steve… he’s a totally different person, even if he resembles his ex in some ways. Steve is nice, like, actually a nice person. A great person. So Billy can’t avoid feeling some sort of weird… affection? Steve takes out the softer part of him.

Steve speaks after a while, interrupting Billy’s spiral of thoughts. "Today you went away without saying hi, you were really rude, Hargrove." "Aww, did I break your heart, princess?" "Yeah, kind of."

Billy throws the cigarette out of the window and then pats his chin, faking a pensive mood. "Such a shame. I can think of some ways to make it up for you." these words have the power to make Steve adorably flushed. Too much? Naah. They have gone too far with their flirting game, they have reached and overstayed the line of what can look like a normal conversation between two straight dudes. It’s not that Harrington can chickenshit now.

Steve scoffs. "Jeesus, why it always sounds like a cheap porno dialogue when it comes from you?" "Dunno, princess. Maybe because you paint me in that kind of situation so often."

Steve reddens badly and almost chokes in his own saliva. "Jeez. Hargrove. You’re gonna kill me here, man."
Billy laughs, open-heartily. "You’re too easy, Harrington."

The rest of the trip is pleasant and full of static, vibrating excitement. Billy turns the volume to the maximum and starts to sing, making Steve laughs and almost crashing into the trees due to his own distraction.

They end up in a glade surrounded by the usual pines and firs. Billy jumps off the car and stares into the darkness, a skeptical expression on his face and his hands on his hips.
"The fuck is that, Harrington?" he asks, turning over the boy that is reaching a six packs in the trunk. "Seriously? You never been here?" Billy shakes his head, making few blond curls swaying slightly. "Na-ha." Steve throws a can at him. "This is the Lovers Lake. Lot of people go here to make out or get high." Billy scoffs and opens the can. "Like there's something else to do in this shithole.-"he leans on the front of the Beemer and takes a sip of the beer, followed by Steve who positions himself next to him.

"What did you do?" he asks, looking genuinely curious. "In Cali?" "Yeah." "Well…" Billy lights another one and sucks a drag. Then, he reaches the pack to Steve who gladly accepts the offer. "…I used to fuck and get high a lot." Billy admits, casually, exhaling a long wave of smoke. "But, music, Harrington. There was a different concert every weekend. And clubs where to sneak in. You need to try mosh-pit once in your life, amigo." "Mosh-pit?" Steve repeats, dumbly.
God, he is cute.

"Yeah, mosh-pit." "What the fuck is that supposed to mean?" Billy thinks for a few seconds. "It's like… when the music hits hard and everyone starts to rave and shoves." Steve looks at him, wide eyed, and gasps like a fish. "Don't people get hurt?" Billy shrugs, casually. "All the fucking time." "Honestly…" Steve looks into the forest and takes a long drag, thoughtful. "…That's one of the stupidest thing that I ever heard."

Billy can't help it. He burst into a laugh, purely amused by Steve's naïf tenderness. "I know, right? But it's fucking cool. Liberating." Steve tsks him, unconvinced.
"So." Billy starts, grinning. "Lovers Lake. A place where making out or getting high. What about us? What was your program?"
Even in the dim light of the night, Steve flushes hard. He playfully pushes Billy's shoulder. "Shut up! Besides, I got weed, dumbass." as to prove that, he reaches a small envelope in his right pocket.

"Oh." Billy comments, flatly, glaring at the other boy with predatory sight. Steve smirks. "Disappointed, Hargrove?" he teases, starting the preparation of the joint. Billy licks his lips, finding Steve's eyes follow

the movement.

"Let's see how it goes, pretty boy."

After almost two hours, two joints and every beer they had they find themselves pleasantly buzzed. They're sitting with their back pressed on the Beemer, under a roof of stars and enjoyable chill air of the night.

Steve has shared a vast range of hilarious stories about Tommy H and Carol, while Billy has just finished telling Steve some dirty anecdote about the middle-ages housewives at the Pool.

"You're so full of shit!" Steve pushes Billy again, almost choking in laughter. "I can't do shit about it, Princess. Moms love me." Steve is gasping for air, hooking Billy's shoulder with a hand and facepalming with the other. "Jeez, Hargrove… the motherfucker." Billy burst into laugher, his limbs are actually aching for how much he's laughing that night. "Sounds badass. Maybe I should tattoo that." "Please, please no…" "Aww, since you're begging so nicely, sweetheart."

Steve breathes again, composing himself. "But… is that true, in the end? Would you have fucked Nancy's mom?" "Of course I would! Why the fuck not? She's hot." Steve grimaces, outraged. "Dude…"

Billy lights a new cigarette and looks up in the sky. "Besides. It's not that I can fuck with who I really want, so… better to have someone desperate and lonely that makes you feel like a king." Steve blushes while his pretty face is struck by a wide range of emotions: disgust, shock, confusion, curiosity. It's almost hilarious.

"Why can't you fuck who you really want?" he asks, frowning. Billy giggles and blows some smoke. "Let's say that I'm too picky for this shithole town, ok?" Steve rolls his eyes. "Geez. You're impossible, Hargrove."

Billy exhales. Fuck it. He's high, dumbly happy, and doesn't give a shit. He turns and faces the boy, finding himself incredibly close to Steve's pretty face. "Harrington…" he exhales, reaching a hand to the other's boy chin. Steve lowers his look on the point of contact,

surprised, then he moves his eyes back to Billy's, who's approaching, slowly, carefully, until their lips are almost touching.

Billy talks, it is a whisper. "…You're a dork." he doesn't leave time for Steve to answer, because their mouth finally meets, it's soft, delicate, almost imperceptible. Two lips barely brushing. It is a strange chaste kiss for Billy Hargrove.

With the same, languid calm, Billy gets back and looks at the mess on Steve's face with a grin. The guy gasps but quickly recovers from the shock. Then, there's just a quick exchange of glances, and, it's impossible to know who starts it, this time, but they're kissing. Properly. It starts with few pecks, but it's not after much that their tongues are meeting, dancing and fighting together.

Steve's hands sink in Billy's hair, ruffling his curls, but Billy doesn't give a shit. Steve can do that. He can do whatever he wants as long as he puts his hands on him. Billy caresses the boy's cheek, sliding his hand down on his neck, rubbing it with his thumb. Steve's skin is smooth and perfect as he has imagined it. But it's not enough, he needs to taste it.
They separate. Steve's pretty face is a sight: his eyes are wide, his pupils dilated, his cheeks with the cutest shade of red… Billy wants to eat him alive. He moves to the boy's neck, starting to kiss it, to suck it.

Steve is panting, a fucking celestial sound to Billy's ear. He pets his head, sliding again his fingers into his curls. "Shit… Billy…" he hisses, his voice broken by arousal. Billy grins on the skin of his neck, satisfied, then sink his teeth in the soft flesh, producing the sexiest moan ever from Steve's mouth. "Holy shit…"
Billy moves on him and sits on his lap, feeling the bulge on Steve's pants that gives him the maddest thrill of excitement. Steve is hard. Like, fucking hard, he can feel it. He's hard for him. It's beautiful.

This time, is Steve to rush on his lips, ravenous. Billy kisses him back, feeling the hands of the boy unbuttoning his shirt and, holy shit. They're gonna do it. He's not sure of doing what, he's not sure of the point of gay stuff that he can reach with Steve, but Steve, in the act of taking off his shirt, is clearly demonstrating that he has intentions that go beyond making out.

Shit. That's too good to be real. Steve takes off his shirt, leaving him with his chest bare, exposed. Then, he gently caresses his skin, his belly, his abdominals, looking at him with devotion, like he's a fine piece of art.
"Like what you see, Harrington?" Billy teases him, making the other boy snaps from his reverie. Steve looks up back into his eyes and talks incredibly serious. "I do. You're gorgeous."

At these words, Billy can't avoid blushing and gasping like some sort of pussy, while his body is overwhelmed by a sudden chill of pleasure.
Fuck yeah. He fucking loves to be praised by Steve. He could just die at that moment, and his life would have been good enough just because of one fucking praise by Steve Harrington. Gosh, he's sick in the brain. But there's no time for thinking about that! He rushes back to Steve's marvelous lips, already craving the taste. Steve lets him take off his preppy polo shirt, following him in the movement, then, he attacks his neck, biting and licking, hungry.

Yeah, now Billy understands how the guy had been the fame of the player. He can sense that he's nervous, but Steve has a natural initiative and confidence that makes him really good at this. Steve moves down from the neck to the chest, kissing everything. Billy finds himself panting, and from his mouth escapes a really embarrassing moan when Steve actually bites one nipple, giving him a startling chill.

"Careful, Harrington…" Billy laughs, petting the beautiful, smooth hair of the other boy. Steve grins on his skin and looks up at him, smugly satisfied. "What? You're gonna cream your pants for me, honey?" he teases. Jesus, he's such a dork. Billy smirks fiercely and pulls his hair, making the boy face him again.
"You wish, pretty boy."

Their mouths meet again. They continue to make out for a while, Billy starts to grind, filthy and lasciviously. Then, he realizes that they have both reached their limits of tolerance, so he moves his hand on Steve's bulge, making him almost bolt in surprise.

"Is that ok, princess? Are you going to chickenshit now?" Billy provokes him, opening the zip of the boy's tight denim and then

stopping, waiting for his response. Steve answers biting Billy's lower lip and moving his hand on the blonde's dick, making him shiver in surprise. Geez, the guy is really confident even if he's a noobie in that game.
They start to stroke themselves slowly, studying each other's faces and reactions. It's not the first time that Billy sees Steve's dick, actually, but it's not something where you look at when you're in the boy's showers. Anyway, it was impossible not to notice that Steve was actually… huge. That was something that had caused envy in Billy for a long time. But now, there's no space for that kind of stupid competition, now he just wants to make Steve feel good, to see how his face is when he has an orgasm. So, every moan from Steve's mouth is a victory for Billy.

They're both too desperately aroused, so they both reach their limits in an embarrassing short amount of short time. Steve kisses him, frantically, giving him the best shiver in his spine. "Steve…" Billy knows how his voice sounds broken and fucked up. Steve looks straight into his eyes and nods slightly, like he's saying 'I'm close too', and god if it isn't the sweetest thing.
They come together, for what feels like a long, ecstatic moment, muffling their moans into their mouths. Then, Billy exhales a final, tired breath and hides his head on the crook of Steve's neck.

"Shit…" he hisses in afterglow into the boy's clavicle. Steve giggles and moves an arm on the boy's shoulder, squeezing him in a tender, half-hug. Then, he plants a small kiss on Billy's blonde curls, a gesture that looks too girlishly and sweet but fuck, Billy is still too dazed to care.
"Yeah, that was… yeah." he agrees, speechless. Billy finally gains some dignity and moves back, facing the boy. "Is that your first time with another dude?" he asks, because seriously, Steve was too confident to be a freaking beginner. Steve shrugs, all cocky. "I guess I'm a natural, Hargrove."
Billy snorts and pushes him. "Don't get too full of yourself, Harrington. You have still a lot of stuff to learn." he moves his now spent dick in the jeans and lifts up the zip. Then, he gets up, his body still overwhelmed and unstable.

"I heard you're a good teacher." Steve jokes, still seated and still with

his embarrassingly big dick out. Billy starts buttoning his shirt. "I might be." "So…" Steve now sounds pensive, thoughtful. "I presume this is not your… first time?" Billy scoffs, finishing up his dressing session and finally gaining a craved cigarette. "It's not, pretty boy."
Steve frowns, dumbly confused. "Seriously? Wow. Didn't expect that, from you. Since you're so…" he points a hand towards him. "…So what?" Billy encourages him. Steve uses an idiotic amount of seconds just to think about the answer, then, he shrugs casually. "Don't know. Since you're so… masculine."

Billy laughs back. "Steve. You would be surprised to find out how many undiscovered faggots there are around. With kids and all the rest. You don't have to be a fairy dancer to be one, that's a dumb idea." Steve looks even more confused. "Are you…?" "Dude." he hesitates, while he finally starts to dress up.
"Are you… like me? Because I believe I still like tits, cunt and that kind of stuff." the question is so pure and natural that Billy can't avoid laugh. Steve Harrington is such a dork. Adorable, naive, dork.

"I'm not like you." Billy states after a long drag of smoke, because, fuck it. The guy has already had his dick in his hand so he could be kind of trustable. But. "What do you mean?" Steve asks, like the big grown idiot he is.
Billy rolls his eyes and pinches the bridge of his nose. Jesus, he is such a Shaolin grade A Zen Monk with this guy. He needs a Nobel for peace or something.
"I said that I'm not like you, Harrington." "But what you mean? All those moms, and those girls…" Billy sighs. "Most of the stories are exaggerated. I exaggerated them. I just fingered a couple of girls at few parties, let them blow me." he turns to face Steve, who's blinking stupidly. "Oh…" he says. Eloquent. "Yeah, oh." "So you're…" "A queer? Kind of. Yeah."

Now Steve is staring at him, his expression is unreadable, and Billy can feel the uneasiness rising in his chest. Is he gonna chickenshit now? Is he gonna reject him, saying that he's disgusting?
But then, Steve pronounces the oddest words. "Wow. Ok. That's ok." now is the time for Billy to blink dumbly like an idiot. "Excuse me?" he spats. Steve giggles slides a hand in his hair. "I said that's ok, Hargrove. Do you need to get your ears checked, amigo?" Billy gasps.

He didn’t expect a reaction like that. Steve makes a step ahead, grabs slightly his chin and presses a too sweet pecks on his lips. "Don’t worry. Your secret is safe with me." he whispers in his mouth. Billy snorts. "It better be, pretty boy. Otherwise I’ll fucking…" Steve interrupts him with another kiss, then another one, and one. Like the sweet teddy bear he is.

"Bla bla bla. Stop talking, Hargrove, you’ll all talking." Steve hisses, but there’s no bite in his voice. He sounds amused. He talks between the soft kisses he’s placing on the boy’s chin. "You don’t have to put your show on me. I like how you are. You don’t have to impress me, to challenge me. You already did. I want you to be yourself, because… you’re perfect like this."

Billy swallows. It’s not the first time he receives that kind of speech, and it hits him hard. He’s the farthest from being perfect, he’s a goddamn mess. But, for some unexplainable mysterious reason, Steve likes him anyway.

Billy smiles. A real, rare smile. Then, he places a last kiss on the boy’s lips.
"You’re a bleeding heart, you know that, Harrington?"

Billy can’t avoid the stupid happy smirk that is plastered on his face when he walks home. He hasn’t been this happy since… he doesn’t know, forever?
Steve is worse than a drug. His person is intoxicating. He feels his brain literally overwhelmed by the guy. It’s like when the drugs start to kick in, but better, stronger.

"I’m home!" he announces when he opens the door, still high from Steve’s touch, scent, from his stupid perfect hair his crazy tasty mouth his smooth, soft skin…
He’s so high from Steve that he doesn’t even notice the glare that Neil is giving him. He’s about to walk to his room, uncaring, when the man hooks his shoulder.
"Where have you been?" he asks, rising suspect in his cold eyes. Billy shivers slightly, but try to look calm and collected. "Afterwork with co-workers. We had a meeting to discuss the rearrangements of the last days." Neil shoves him, getting instantly angry at Billy’s excuse.

"Bullshit! I told you that you're banned from parties. You're lying to me, boy, I can tell it. You believe I'm stupid?" he comes closer to Billy's face, making him flinch instinctively.

Billy finds himself speechless. He's out of words. He has been stupid and reckless, he knew that his father was gonna give him shit but still, he has agreed to go out with Steve anyway.
Neil grabs the collar of his shirt, foreshadowing an imminent beating. "I will ask you again. Where have you been, boy?" Billy lowers his gaze and swallows. "Out. With someone." he whispers, ashamed. Neil gets even closer and speaks low and venomously."Who?" "…A girl. She's… my… girlfriend. It's new."
Billy hasn't the courage to face his father. He fears that if he lifts his look on him, he will break and be discovered.

"A girl?" "Yes, sir." "One of your whores?" Yeah. Because Billy can be faggot and surrounded by whores at the same time, either way is wrong for the 'good man' Neil.
"No sir. She's different. She's… a good girl." Billy cannot stop his put-up story, so he continues workin on it. Maybe the sudden interest of Neil in his so-called 'girlfriend' is a good sign. "She's smart. And nice."

After these words, Neil draws back slightly, still hooking the collar of Billy's shirt, and glares at him. Billy can't decipher what he's going to do next and the feeling of uncertainty is making his knees tremble. After a few impossible long seconds, Neil speaks again, and, incredibly, he sounds calmer, less on the edge to snap out. "Is that where you have been when you've been out for days?" Billy swallows and nods. "Yes, sir."

Finally, Neil leaves Billy's shirt and takes a step back. "Why didn't you tell me?" Billy lifts his sight, meeting his father's. "It's still early." Neil frowns, looking irritated again, so Billy immediately corrects. "Sorry, sir."

There's another long tense pause of silence, then, Neil sighs and squeezes Billy's shoulder, a touch that is far from being appreciated. Billy is still trembling slightly, his body cold, overwhelmed by fear. What is his old-man going to do next? Is he going to burst and punch him? Is he going to leave him alone?
Billy prepares himself for the worst when he waits for his father to

speak again. He has an unreadable expression on his face that is literally killing Billy inside.
Unexpectedly, a small, creepy smile appear on Neil's face. Billy shivers. Is it a smile or a grin? He's going to kick him, definitely. He's just playing.

Neil finally speaks.
"I can see you like her a lot."

Wait. What the fuck?!

Billy gasps, shocked. Has his old-man hit his head? Neil squeezed his shoulder again. "Maybe this place has finally taught something good to you."

Billy swallows and nods, slowly. Neil pats his shoulder. "Will you introduce this girl to your family, maybe for a dinner?" he asks then, and Billy can't decipher if he's serious or that's some sort of sick game. So, he just nods again, and mumble a barely audible 'yes, sir'.

"Good. Looking forward to meet her." there's something that vaguely resembles pride in Neil's voice, and it's kind of fucked up, but Billy can't avoid feeling momentarily out of danger. He tells another 'yes, sir', this time more firmly, and Neil gives him another strong pat to the shoulder.

"Go now, son. There's food in the oven if you're hungry." and that's the most 'paternal' stuff that Neil has ever said to him in years, all because he thinks that Billy has a sort of serious relationship with a good, nice girl.

"Thanks, sir." Billy mumbles, rushing then to the kitchen. He can finally breathe again. That was close, but, apparently, he managed to get some respite from his father with his new made-up girlfriend bullshit. Now, here's the problem. Who the fuck is he gonna introduce to his so-called family?

Notes for the Chapter:

> So I really hope the smut didn't suck too much, I don't want to write hardcore stuff, I just wanted to

write about teens without so many experience exploring their sexuality, between awkwardness, nervous giggles and stuff like that.

10. I wanna be adored

Summary for the Chapter:

Amends & Smut

Notes for the Chapter:

Another big one

Lucas is staring at the door for ten minutes straight.
He knows that is stupid, that he has nothing to worry about since Max has invited him over, telling him that their parents would be out all weekend, leaving just her and her psycho stepbrother to themselves. But here's the problem: her psycho stepbrother.

This is not the first time that Lucas is in front of his girlfriend's home, and the last one wasn't exactly nice, since Max had badly kick him out, hiding his presence from Billy.
But, apparently, now they are 'cool', so Lucas must not be concerned. Easy to say. Even if the asshole has helped them with the monster hunting, even if now he's super bros with Steve and kind of nice with El, Lucas can't avoid being wary. He has brought his sling with him, just to be careful.

After a long, surrendered sigh, he rings the bell and waits for the door to open. He can hear Billy shouting something at Max and her annoyed response, then, the red head of his girlfriend appears in front of him, smiling at the doorjamb with one hand on her hip and another on the doorknob.
"Hi, stalker. You're late, come in." she chirps. Lucas doesn't want exactly to tell her that he's late because he has been busy chickening out in front of the door. They share a very quick kiss.

Once inside, he squirms awkwardly at the sight of Billy who is working out lifting weights in front of the TV, with a half-smoked cigarette on his lips (gross!). He expected to find the guy there, it's his house too after all, but still, he can't avoid feeling himself in the enemy's territory. The wolf's lair.

Billy acknowledges his presence with a nod, cigarette still leaning between his lips. "Sinclair." he greets, flat voice, continuing to lift weights uncaring. Lucas nods back, uncertain, then he turns to Max, his look full of discomfort. Max sighs and rolls her eyes, catching her boyfriend's hesitation.
"I told you we're cool. Chill out, stalker. He's not gonna do anything bad." she spats playfully. "I'm ok as long as Neil doesn't find out about your underage sex thing. Honestly, I don't give a shit." Billy confirms, continuing to lift weights, without looking at them. Both Max and Lucas flush badly, while she yells, outraged:"We're not… we aren't… Gross, Billy!", receiving a shrug as a response from the guy. Lucas isn't convinced yet, but he has to trust the situation. Besides, Max looks insanely relaxed, and it's really strange considering how her stepbrother just a couple of weeks before had abducted a lot of people. Seems like they really had figured their shit out.

They eventually go to Max's room and start making out under Madonna's music. However, Lucas is too thoughtful about the entire situation, so he interrupts their kissing session to express his doubts.

"Max, I was thinking about your stepbrother…" he starts, causing the instant perplexity in his girlfriend. "Were you thinking about my stepbrother while we were kissing?" she asks, with a lifted eyebrow. Lucas flushes and talks with an embarrassed, high-pitched voice. "NO. NO!" at his amusing reaction, Max laughs. She's messing with him. "I was thinking about him… in general. Not in this particular situation." Lucas explains, moving to the opposite side of her bed. "I know he helped us with the demodogs and he's now some sort of super hero… but, are you sure we can trust him? I mean, he seems kinda cool now, but what if he turns out asshole again?"

Max leans back, pointing her elbow on the blankets, and scoffs, half pissed half amused. "I told you, he's not gonna give us any trouble. Do you trust me or not?" Lucas gulps. "I trust you. But I don't trust him. He's a psycho! Come on, Max! I really don't understand why you like him all of a sudden." looks like these words have the power to make Max even more pissed, and Lucas honestly doesn't know why. Why is she all protective of him? He's an asshole, a very shitty person that used to torment her. It's not like few good actions can delete history of jerkiness.

"Listen…" she sighs, moving a red strand behind her ear, "You don't know him. You don't know… us. It's not that it has always been like this, we used to be friends, really. Then, a lot of shit happened back in Cali… and something broke between us. I can't tell you the details." Lucas glares at her, skeptical. "But…" she continues, resolute, "…He has been through a lot, seriously. I'm just… happy he's back. Like, his old self?" "Old self?" "Yeah, asshole. We used to be friends. He's not that bad, I can assure you. He's just… he has a temper."

Lucas continues to stare at his girlfriend. What she has just said doesn't sound very convincing. Most of all, it sounds very vague and mysterious.
Lucas has been watching Billy, carefully. He had noticed things, strange things impossible not to look at. Like, the very weird and misunderstanding way Billy uses to interact with Steve. Lucas has started to have suspects that he had also shared with the party.

So, he can't avoid talking.

"I have a theory." he starts, after a while. Max smirks and gives him a glare like: 'So?'. He sighs and rubs his temples. "Promise me you won't laugh." "Can't promise anything, stalker." "Ok…" Ok. He can do it. It's just a stupid theory.
"I think your bother… could be… a fag… for Steve."

The confession is brutal and difficult, and Max's face doesn't make it easier. She blinks, shocked, for an embarrassing number of seconds. Then, she scoffs. "You shouldn't use that word. It's offensive." "What? *Fag*?" Lucas snaps, distraught. It's not that Max is denying his theory… and that's odd. "Yeah, dumbass. You shouldn't use it." Lucas gasps, searching for words. "So, that's true? Is he a…?" Max scoffs again. This time she looks annoyed. "Why do you care?" "Because it's fucking hilarious, maybe that's why?" "Hilarious?!" Max jumps from her bed, and now she seems like on the foot of war. "Do you have any idea of what he's been through? How difficult is for him?!"

Lucas can't help himself, he laughs, bitter and mean. "What? To be a fag? He chooses it." "He didn't, dumbass!" Max groans, clutching her hair, exasperated. "Listen…" she speaks, calmer, after a pause. "…It's not a choice, ok? He didn't choose anything. He's just like this, and he must face a living hell with his father every day. So, give him a

break, would you?"

Now, that's good. Give the guy a break? Like he hasn't been the first one to be a dick with him?! Lucas tsks and crosses his arms. "He's a racist bastard." he spats, grinning his teeth. Max sighs. "It's not like that. His father… let's say that he wouldn't be happy to find you here. And he tends to take it on Billy. So, he was just being a selfish prick, protecting himself and pretending it was for me. Seriously, it's a long story."

These words have the power to cool off Lucas a little bit, but he's not convinced yet about the 'innocence' of Max's stepbrother.
"Ok." he states, after a while. "What about the fact that he apologized to Steve and has been nice to El, but he didn't has the decency to say anything to me!"
Max stares at him with a skeptical frown. "So you want an apology? Like, an official apology?" "What? No! I didn't say that!" "Let's go get it." he can't debate, Max has already grabbed his wrist and started to drag him outside the room, under Lucas's complaints.

The living room is empty, TV still going on, and they can hear metal music blasting from the bathroom. Max doesn't give up and plant her feet in front of the door, knocking loud. "What the hell are you doing? He's in the bathroom he's gonna kill us…" Lucas whines, still trapped under his girlfriend's grip.

They hear Billy yelling from inside. "I'm busy! Learn to wait and fuck off, Maxine!" the red-head bangs again the door, harder this time. "Open up Billy, this is important!"
Lucas facepalms. He's gonna die. He's sure. He has forgotten his sling in Max's room, now Billy is going to kill them and drink from their skull.

The door opens, spreading out loud metal music. Billy is standing, leaning at the doorjamb, his hair dump and just a towel on his hips to cover his… thing. He looks annoyed at them, but not on the verge to burst out and kill them. Lucas guesses that is a good point, but what If he's tricking them, waiting for the right moment to strike?

"The fuck you want?" he asks, bored. Max answers keeping up eye contact with him, resolute and uncaring. "Lucas wants your

apologies." Lucas immediately starts to deny. "No, no, Max! Let go, this is not a good idea!" Billy completely ignores him and speaks again with an annoyed voice to his stepsister. "And he wants it now?" Max nods.
Billy sighs and rubs his temples, looking all stressed out, mumbling something like 'fucking brats' between his teeth. Then, he looks at Lucas, extremely serious and collected. "Sinclair. I'm sorry I threatened you. That night I was fucked up and I kind of made a mess. It's not an excuse, and I'm sorry, ok?" Lucas blinks, trying to decipher the guy's face. He doesn't look very sorry or involved in his apologies, they're kind of shitty and far-fetched, but still, they are apologies. It's something.

"O…ok." Lucas stutters, while a sly grin spreads on Max's freckled face. She's satisfied. "Ok. We're cool." Lucas adds, nodding slightly. Billy tilts his head back and looks at him like a hawk. Then, after an embarrassing number of seconds spent just looking at him from up to button with his idiotic alpha-lion attitude, he turns to Max. "Now, if you don't mind, I was about to shave my balls." after this big announcement he slams the door to their face.

"EWW! GROSS, BILLY!" Max bangs again on the door, but there is no response, just the sound of the electric razor going on. She turns at Lucas and gives a small shrug, smiling. "Well, that was painless, wasn't it?" "Painless?!" Lucas repeats, outraged. "Easy for you to say, I was about to barf my heart for how much tachycardia I was having!"
They get back in Max's room, Madonna's record still playing on the radio. "Such overly-dramatic, Lucas! He apologized, didn't he? Now you can sleep tight and stop being a chicken." she pokes him in the chest, grinning. "I'm not… Jeeez!" he mumbles, irritated.

Then, a static sound from the walkie talkie catches their attention. Steve's voice spreads through her room.
"Max. You there?" he asks, and that's kind of odd because what does Steve want from her? She grabs the transceiver and presses the button to talk. "Steve. What do you want? Over." after another static sound, Steve's voice is audible again. "Are you home? Is your stepbrother there?" at this question, Max and Lucas stare at each other, sharing a complicit look, then, they both burst into laughter.

"Oh my god…" Lucas sighs, between the giggles. "Yeah… Steve is

kind of obvious." she declares, rubbing her chin.

"Harrington. I don’t pay you to stare into the void all day."

Keith’s voice sounds distant and muffled to Steve’s ears. He’s been standing next to the sci-fi section, a box full of returned VHS, for ten minutes straight, looking absent-mindedly at the titles on the shelf.
His manager decides to give it another try. "Harrington." he calls, firmly, finally making Steve snaps out of his reverie, jumping in his place. "What?" he starts to place the VHS in what is supposed to be their right spot, under the severe gaze of the other boy. "Harrington." he hisses, this time sounding annoyed for some strange reason. Steve continues his job, almost ignoring him, and asks casually:"Yeah? Is there a problem?"

Keith grunts. "You tell me, Harrington. Clearly you become a movie critic out of my knowledge, otherwise, I wouldn’t understand how you decide to classify Grease as science fiction." "What?" Steve repeats, dumbly. Then, he realizes his mistake and hastily catches back the wrong placed VHS.
"Yeah, uhm… you know, dancing. Dancing is kind of magic. Like… science fiction." Steve babbles, giggling nervously. Keith gives just a last, stern look and twist, walking towards the storage, mumbling something contemptuous to himself.

"He’s kind of right, dingus." Robin agrees, appearing behind him with her arm crossed and a skeptical look. "Today you space out more than usual. Is there anything you want to share with the class?" Steve freezes on his spot, and sighs. "Ok." he mumbles to himself.

He turns to face his friend and squeezes her shoulder, all serious all of a sudden. "Robin. You have no idea what happened yesterday." he announces. Robin makes a face. "What happened, exactly, Stevie?" he opens his mouth to speak and then stops, searching for the right words.

Truth is, last night was so intense that Steve feels dizzy just at the thought of it. Considering that he hasn’t stopped doing that, here’s explained his absent state of mind. The memory of Billy’s hands on him gives him a thrill of excitement and a dangerous risk to get a

boner right there in the Family Video, and it wouldn't be exactly appropriate.

He walks to the counter, sitting in his usual place, followed by Robin. "So? Cat got your tongue?" she urges him. Once again, Steve sighs. "I was with Hargrove… Billy." "Wow. First name basis, aren't we?" Steve grimaces and ignores her. "I followed your advice."

The girl rolls her eyes. "Which one, dingus? Because last time I checked I was giving you plenty of life advice…" Steve looks around, trying to figure out if he's in safe territory to talk about those kinds of stuffs. The shop is half empty, there are just a couple of customers, and they're far enough to make them inaudible. So, he leans forward, getting closer to Robin, like he's about to tell her a secret.

"You know… the one… about…. stick my tongue into his mouth and see how it goes." he explains, almost sheepishly. Robin makes a surprised exclamation. Then, she freezes, blinking in shock. "No… you're telling me that… you did it?" once again, Steve turns his head to the left and the right, looking for a safe environment. Then, he smirks, a shadow of his old cocky self. "I did it." he confirms, proud. Robin laughs and covers her mouth with both her hands, happy.

"I can't believe it! What… what did he do? How was his reaction?" she urges his, her eyes literally glowing. "Do you really wanna know?" Steve asks, leaning forward again to getting more confidential. Robin nods. "Of course I do." "Well…" Steve hesitates, then, he grins. "…we jerked off each other."

Robin gasps like a fish, then, she burst into laughter and push Steve, a small red tint on her cheeks. "Oh my god! Seriously! Damn, Stevie, I'm actually impressed. Congratulation there, tiger!" she throws a friendly punch at him in the shoulder, which actually quite hurts but Steve can't really show that. He massages the hurt part and giggles. "I know, it was… damn it was amazing. He's like, the hottest creature on this planet and I just lose my head when I'm with him and I can't understand shit anymore. You know, something snaps, it's chemical."

Robin chuckles and throws her arms. -I can see that, dingus.- -He said I'm a natural!- Steve exclaims, excited. -You know, like… he even asks me If I've been with a guy before! So I guess I was good for him,

after all. I mean, he came. So, it couldn't be so bad, am I right?- this time, Robin flushes badly and facepalms, adorably embarrassed. -Gross, Steve! Spare me the details, won't you?- Steve laughs and shrugs. -Sorry.- then, he "boops" her nose with a grin on his face. -Aww, you're cute when you're mad!- she pushes him, scoffing. -Stop right there, heartbreaker!-

Keith appears from nothing and glares at them, then, he walks to some distant shelf. They share a complicit look and try not to burst into laughter again. Once gained back seriousness, Steve leans his elbow on the counter and his palms on his cheeks, a thoughtful expression on his face. "I want to invite him over tonight." he announces. Robin lifts her eyebrow. "Well, no one is stopping you. I'm sure this is exactly what the guy wants. But aren't you hasting things? You just made out with him yesterday…" Steve scoffs. "Robin! We're boys, b o y s. We are hasty, we go straight to the point." Robin scoffs back, annoyed. "Steve. I wish you could understand that such thing as 'what boys do what girls do' is a bunch of bullshit."

Steve doesn't respond. What if she's right? She's always right, after all.

Steve feels grandiose. Like he hasn't felt in a while.

For once in a time, he's thankful that it's the weekend and he has the house empty for himself. It's not that recently his life has been full of occasions to exploit the privilege of the absence of his shitty parents, hanging out with a bunch of kids and his unique peer friend (Robin). But today… today he can finally take advantage of the 'freedom' of having nobody in sight and spend some time with Billy undisturbed.

He feels excited and dizzy at the idea while he tides up the living room like a good housewife, singing aloud 'Every breath you take' by Police that is blasting from the speakers of his radio. Gosh, just thinking about the guy, about what they have done the night before… gives him a strong, overwhelming thrill all over his body.
He hasn't stopped figuring it in his mind all day, finding difficult to stay focused at work under the amused gaze of Robin.

And now he's going to see him again, and god knows what they're

going to do. His heart bounces at the thought.

Finding out to be bisexual and have the first experience with a guy in just a week has been kind of hasty and way too unexpected, but he's trying to not freak out about it and just follow the flow. He hasn't had any sort of regret for what had happened, so… as long as his mind decides to collaborate and stays sort of clear about it… well. Let it be.
But Billy… that wasn't the first time for him. Steve hasn't stopped wondering who and what he has done back in Cali, trying not to feel jealous or scared by the fact that the guy is experienced. Steve just hopes not to do anything stupid, not to fuck up with his lack of knowledge about all the… gay stuff.

Billy looked surprised and very pleased the night before. He said that he was a natural. So Steve shouldn't be worried too much. But jerking off a guy seems easy, what about the other stuffs?! Steve has no freaking idea how to do the other stuffs. He's not even sure what those stuffs are, like, at all. How can two guys have sex? How is the mechanism behind that, like, technically speaking?

If Steve starts to ask himself this kinds of things he will hopelessly freak out. So, he just needs to continue to avoid all those doubts and just see how it goes.
He flinches when he hears the doorbell, too focused on his thoughts.

He exhales a long breath, getting psychologically ready to face Billy.

Ok Steve. You can do this. Switch to the player mode, act like you don't care too much. Yeah, now you're going to open the door and say something like, 'Hey, Hargrove, fancy meeting you here'. Goddamit that's fucking stupid, you invited him to your place! So, what about, 'Hargrove, didn't know if you were going to show up'. Like you don't give a shit. Yes, that's perfect. Go on, Steve. You own this.

He repeats himself while he walks to the door. He opens. He's ready for his studied gag, he's ready for the uncaring, cocky player mode Steve, but when he sees Billy, leaning languidly on the door jamb, a grin plastered on his face, his shirt unbuttoned to the navel, his hair looking way more perfect than usual and his cologne overwhelming his nostrils, Steve just stares and gasps like a fish.

Billy stares back, grinning, challenging, without saying anything. After an embarrassing amount of time, he speaks, slow and lasciviously. "Are you gonna let me in or we're going to stare into each other's eyes all night, pretty boy?" he purrs, and Steve finally snaps from his reverie, flushing badly and blaming himself internally. "Ye… yeah! Sure! Come on in." he makes a step back, giving Billy space to enter, and close the door.

Billy looks at the house, vaguely interested, his hands in the pocket of his leather jacket. Then, he whistles. "Nice place you got here, Harrington. Looks like a mansion or something." Steve shrugs, still trying to gain back some dignity from the previous scene. "It's nothing special." he mumbles. Billy is glaring at him, scrutinizing him under those piercing blue eyes, and Steve feels like he's melting under that gaze, so he needs to speak up to cover his uneasiness. "You wanna do a tour or something?"

Billy waits to respond, so much that Steve almost thinks that the guy's broken. Then, he makes a step ahead, dragging his scent of cheap cologne with him, and approaches Steve until their face are separated by a barely few inches. "I don't give a shit about your house." he declares, brutally honest.

Then, their mouths are crashing, and Steve finds himself thinking about how he has craved that contact in the hours they have been separated. The kiss deepens quickly, their tongues meet and start fighting for dominance.

Steve's brain goes to automatic mode. He stops thinking about what he's doing, he just does. All his anxieties, all the self-doubt, the pain and the loneliness, everything is swept away by the person of Billy.
Soon both their hands go under their belt, and once again Steve finds himself moving naturally. He listens to Billy's sweet huffing, in his ear, and try to decipher what he wants, what he likes most. He wants to give him something good, he wants to show him in all the possible ways how much he likes him.

So, it has been just a week that Steve has discovered his so-called bisexuality and he has already done two handjobs. That's pretty impressive.

He thinks that while he watches Billy making a joint, sitting on the counter. He wonders what he's thinking. The guy looks totally relaxed, at ease. It's so strange seeing him like this, yet so beautiful. Billy is even prettier with a tranquil, relaxed expression on his face. Without that angry frown, that violent glimpse in his eyes.

Geez. How could he be this pretty? That shouldn't be legal. Steve has the urge to kiss him again, to devour his mouth and leave him breathless. He wants to say how he thinks that he's beautiful even in a messed-up way, like something that is painfully and dangerously beautiful.
But he can't. He can't show how involved he already is.

What would Billy do? Would he laugh and mock him? Would he tell him that he's a loser?
He's about to spiral into paranoia when Billy finally speaks, after licking the paper of the joint and closing it. "You know, Harrington. You shouldn't creep on my kid sister next time you want me to come over to get laid."

Wait. What?!

Steve snaps, outraged. "You think I called you just to get laid?!" Billy shrugs and lights up the joint. "It's okay. I wanted that too. You don't need to get your panties in a twist, princess."

Ugh. Here he is. The old asshole Billy Hargrove, sometimes getting back from the dead. Steve sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose. "Is that what you think? Seriously? That I just want to do… this kind of stuff with you?" Billy scoffs, mean. "It's ok, Stevie. We don't have to be all romantic like some kind of faggots."

Steve sighs again. Here they are. The infamous coping mechanism. He has to retire his thoughts about 'how beautiful and relaxed Billy is', because clearly there's something messy going on in the guy's brain at the moment. What the fuck is Billy thinking now? Why is he being an asshole all of a sudden? Steve decides to try for the 'mature way' and ask him straight.

"Tell me what you're thinking." Billy looks at him confused, but just for a second. "Tell me what's going on." Steve insists, resolute. Of

course, the guy doesn't want to go for the easy way. He laughs, bitterly. "So what?! We can open each other's heart and cry all night like some fucking pussies?" well, isn't it kind of what they have done recently?
Steve thinks that he has understand. Billy is scared, and he's being a bitch about it. If Steve will give him the 'excuse' for being angry, he will turn out saying things that he will regret. So, Steve must find a way to cool him off.

He's pretty sure that everything he will say will be used against him, so he decides to go on another way.

He opens the fridge and throws a can to Billy, that grabs it without saying anything. Then, he walks to the doorway and looks at the other boy, serious.
"Come." he just orders, surprising himself for the firmness of his own voice. "Where?" "Just follow me, Hargrove." Steve starts to walk without him, and after some seconds he finds the other boy reaching him hastily.

Billy whistles again at the sight of Steve's pool, taking a sip of his beer with a malicious grin plastered on his face. "Not bad, Harrington. Are you trying to impress me here with your money? What's next, are you going to show me your daddy's cigars?" clearly he's still in the mood to be a pain in the ass. Steve ignores him and sits on a garden chair that faces right to the pool, illuminated artificially by small headlights. Billy is still standing, squirming on his spot, like he's ready for some action.

God, that guy gives Steve anxiety.

"A girl died here." Steve declares, after a while, looking pensive at the light reflections on the water. Maybe this is not what Billy was thinking to hear, because he looks shocked for a moment. Steve avoids eye-contact with him and continues talking. "Her name was Barbara Holland. She was Nancy's best friend. One of those monsters… a Demogorgon, took her." Billy doesn't say anything, his expression is softening.

"I was having a party with Tommy H, Carol and Nancy. I was in my room, I was… with Nancy, while the monster took her. We left her

alone, and I didn't give a flying fuck."
There's another pause, broken just by the sounds of the crickets. Billy looks surprisingly careful, concentrated on the story.
"Our life continued. I still couldn't give a shit. I just cared about Nancy, but most of all myself. The Halloween party, last year, when you… dethrone me or something, Nancy got drunk and dumped me. She told me that I was bullshit. And she was right, I was, bullshit."

Billy tsks, receiving a glare in response.

"Anyway… a lot of shit happened next. You know, between the death of a girl in my pool, me being still hopeless in love with Nancy, the monsters and… you giving me a fucking concussion, I wasn't very paying attention to all the 'social hierarchy' stuff. You were pissed by the fact that I've been dethroned without opposing resistance, but, truth is, it all looked stupid and meaningless after what happened."

Steve reaches the joint and takes a drag, still without watching Billy but feeling his gaze on him.

"I guess I was just an asshole. And I regret that I couldn't understand it before. Things would have been different, maybe I wouldn't have a dead girl on my conscience and maybe Nance…" he stops. That was a stupid thing to say with Billy next to him. He blames the drug.
Billy scoffs, still standing, the finished can on the ground and his hands on his hips. "You got such a hero saint complex there, Harrington." he spats, glaring at Steve from up to button.

"What?!" Steve snaps, dumbly. Billy sighs and crosses his arm, while Steve is trying to decipherers the boy's behavior. Is he mad? Did he say something stupid?
"It's not your fault that girl died. Not your fault this fucked up town has freaking monster roaming in the forest." "Yes, but…" "…You were in your room, screwing, so fucking what? You left her alone? Ok maybe you were rude or something but Jesus, you're just a boy. Just… a fucking human being so bite me! Don't you realize how you always blame yourself for everything? Stop it."

Billy talks fast, eyes widened. Yeah, he looks kind of mad, but Steve can't still tell why.

"Why are you upset?" Steve asks, tentatively, receiving a scoff in response. "I'm not." Billy declares. "It's just that you piss me off. Get your shit together, Steve."
First name bases? That sounds important. Looks like Billy remembers Steve's name just when he's about to come or when he's mad about something. Interesting.
Steve groans, annoyed. "So precious from you, Hargrove." he expects Billy to snap, to grab his collar, to threaten him, but, surprisingly, the guy's face saddens a little bit and he talks with a low voice.

"I know. I fucking know that, what do you think? I know that I'm fucked up, that there's something wrong in my head…"

Shit. That's depressing. Steve tentatively reaches a hand, but Billy makes a step back. "But I'm trying…" he sighs. "…I'm trying to fix up my mess. I don't know if it's too late, but… I don't know, I just want to stop to punctually fuck up my life with my own hands."

Steve stands, dragging the chair with him, and grabs Billy's bicep, an apprehensive frown on his face. "Billy…" "Don't fucking give me that look, Harrington." the other boy hisses, but there isn't much venom, he sounds more… tired, and bitter. "It's just… I want to stop to hate myself. Hate what I am and what I did." "Fucking me too." Steve declares, with a smirk. Billy lifts his gaze, meeting his, and smiles back too, slightly. "That's really depressing shit." he jokes, and Steve is just glad that he's back to be sarcastic and not in search of a fight, like before.

"Sorry about before." Billy says, all of a sudden, causing the evident surprise in Steve. "What?" "I was being an asshole, and you're very… patient, I guess? I mean… I know I'm not easy. Everybody would have been pissed off by me already, I don't understand how you can do that."

Billy talks all serious, staring right into Steve's eyes. That's a pretty strong confession. Steve gasps, searching for words, shocked by how open-heartily Billy has just spoken to him. Then, he giggles nervously and parts his hair. "I don't know, I mean, yeah, it's true that you're an asshole and you teste my patience a lot but I guess I'm very good at it. I'm a great baby-sitter after all."

Billy laughs and pokes on his chest, pushing him back to the chair. Steve just lets him do, smirking.
"You know, Harrington…" Billy purrs, leaning over him, arms on the armrests of the chair. "…I picture you, sitting here, thinking about that dead girl, all sad, drowning in your guilt…" he talks with a low voice, almost drowsily, sliding a finger on Steve's arm. "Yeah, that's pretty much how things go." Steve admits, overwhelmed by the sudden intrusion of Billy in his personal space, and his clearly flirting mode. Damn. How can the guy switch mood so fast? He can go from angry, to sad to horny in a minute. He's like a living storm of emotions.

Billy gets closer to him and breathe into his mouth, causing a chill in Steve's spine. He moves his sight, from up to down. "I don't like that." he declares, after a while. Steve giggles, nervous. "Yeah? Why's that?"

Billy gives him a last, long glare in the eyes. Then, without saying anything, he gets on his knees, moving his arms on Steve's thighs. And damn, that instantly makes Steve's blood all going to a single place, causing him a violent blunder.

Billy is caressing his legs, eyes half-closed in a pensive frown. "I want to change that." Billy tells, absently, like he's speaking to himself, and, god, if he isn't the most gorgeous creature in the world right there, on his knee for Steve. "I want you… thinking about me when you sit on this chair, next time. I want you to think about me every time you look at this fancy pool that you hate so much…"

Steve lifts his eyebrow, slightly surprised. That's a pretty hard statement to say. Finally, Billy lifts his sight and stare right into Steve's eyes. His look is so intense, so serious as Steve has never seen him.

"I don't want you slacking off when you're here. I want you to think about that time that I gave you the best blowjob of your life."

Holy shit.

Steve sighs, blushing hard. Billy has already interrupted eye contact and returned to take care of what he has in front of him. He starts to unbutton his belt and his jeans, slowly.

"Confident, aren't we?" Steve teases, trying not to sound already desperate for what Billy is about to do. Damn, just the proximity of the guy to his dick is making his head spin badly. "Shut up." Billy just responds, flat-voice, without venom or anger.

Damn… to replace his bad thoughts there with a new, good one. That's actually pretty… sweet? In a kind of messed up way? Steve wishes he could tell that Billy, how grateful he feels at that moment, but he is pretty sure that the guy wouldn't appreciate that kind of thing. He looks like a person that doesn't like to show 'affection' with his words at all, so is better for Steve to shut up.

Billy presses small kisses to his bulge in his underwear, making Steve gasps embarrassingly. He clutches the armrests of the chair and makes a long exhale, tilting his head back, moving his look to the starry sky.

Fuck. That won't be easy, not at all. He's afraid that if he watch Billy doing what he's doing, it will be all over awkwardly soon. So, a guy needs to adapt.
He grits his teeth when he feels himself finally free and Billy's breath tickles his skin. He craves more, he craves Billy's mouth on him. But there's a pause and Billy's breath disappears, leaving him extremely frustrated and disappointed. Steve lowers his gaze, finding Billy smirking lasciviously at him, he was actually waiting for Steve to check at him, that prick.

Billy, looking satisfied to have Steve's eyes on his again, finally moves on and starts to lick him. It looks like he's playing, teasing him. He keeps his eyes on Steve and god if his look isn't something incredibly filthy and impossibly hot.

Finally, his mouth is on him and it's fucking perfect and Steve can't avoid huff in surpise.

"Billy…" he whispers, and his voice sounds already fucked up due to his arousal. He looks at Billy, sucking him with all that… devotion, it's an image so beautifully obscene that Steve wants to print it in his mind for the rest of his life.

He lifts a hand. He has the urge to hold the boy's hair, but he isn't

sure if it is something that he can do or not. It doesn't sound very respectful… so he just lowers the hand back on the armrest, but Billy, like a fucking psychic, grabs his hand and puts it on his hair without hesitation.
God, this guy! He's too good to be real.

Billy's curls through his fingers are soft. He puts just a small amount of pressure, still fearing to be a rude lover or something. He doesn't want to treat Billy like he used to treat the girls before Nancy. He used to always think about the sake of his cock and he eventually pleased the girls just to please his ego itself. It had changed with Nancy, and now with Billy… he wants to be good for him. He has the urge, almost desperate, to be a good lover for him.

Damn. He likes him. So much.

Is his dick thinking for him? Because at that moment he would almost tell that he kind of love the guy.

Steve can't resist much anymore. He tightens the grip on Billy's hair, tilts his head back, and starts to breathe raggedly. Billy notices it and bobs his head harder.
Holy shit. Nope. He can't go on anymore, he desperately wants to release, so he talks to warn Billy, but obviously he's voice comes out all messed up. "Billy… I'm gonna c…" he can't even finish the sentence that he desperately comes into Billy's mouth. Instead of moving back, Billy gladly swallows all Steve's spunk, and it's so hot yet so perfectly obscene that Steve just can die there, on that chair, in front of his stupid pool.

Yeah, Billy Hargrove just gave him the best blowjob of his life. Pretty much.

He's still panting in the afterglow when Billy stands up, cleaning his chin with the back of his hand, a lascivious grin on his face. He's looking at the great spectacle of Steve trying to gain back his breath, still pretty much overwhelmed.

"Holy shit…" exhales the brunette, eyes wide. "Told ya." Billy hisses. "I'm very good at that." he adds, cocky.

That guy… he really knows how to leave Steve breathless and speechless. He really knows how to leave Steve completely dumb.
"Yeah…" Steve nods, still dizzy. "…Yeah, you are." Billy is smirking, proud and vain like a damn peacock. Steve decides to strengthen his ego. He deserves that, after all.
"You are amazing."

Looks like these words had had some sort of effect on Billy, because he can't keep back a small sigh and a light cute blush on his cheeks. Steve decides that he fucking loves that. And also, he's so grateful to him that he wants to reciprocate. So he reaches Billy's belt, looking at him hesitantly.
"I want to do that too."

Billy makes a small laugh. "You don't have to, pretty boy. You never been with a guy, it's all-new territory for you. You should take it easy." Steve scoffs. "If you don't want me to do it, then I won't. But If you're saying that just to be protective or something, forget it. I want to do it. So much. I want you to feel good." Steve is still clenching Billy's belt, looking up at him with a frown. Billy moves a hand on his hair and starts caresses him softly. Steve takes that as a sign of encouragement, so he talks pointing his eyes right into Billy's.

"I want to suck your cock."

At these words, Billy blinks in surprise. Tsk. He didn't expect that. Steve takes it as a victory, and starts unbuttoning his jeans.

"Jesus, you're a dirty talker, Harrington…" Billy jokes, petting Steve's hair with a smirk plastered on his face. Steve ignores him and focuses on what he has to do.
"Tell me if it sucks." he says, betraying the concern in his voice.
It's not that he hasn't received a lot of blowjobs in the past, so he just needs to remember what he used to like most and repeat it on Billy.
But it's easy to say. He finds out, practically speaking, that sucking a dick is actually quite difficult. He didn't know how the jaw would starts to ache after a while, or how you should be careful about not going too deep, otherwise, you'll have the reflex to barf.

But, above all, he doesn't think that he's doing a bad job. He looks at Billy's reaction, his heavy breathing, his adam's apple bobbing

slightly when he tilts his head back in pleasure.

When Billy's about to come, he actually can feel it in his mouth. Steve decides that he wants to try to swallow too, but it's kind of a disaster in the end. He's too surprised by the sudden, musky taste in his mouth, so he snaps his head back, instinctively.

He rubs his mouth with the back of his hand, but the spunk is kind of sticky and don't go away this easily. Billy looks at him and laughs, still pleasantly buzzed by his recent orgasm. He then rubs a thumb on Steve's cheek, an almost motherly gesture.

"Wow…" Steve comments, once again, breathless. Then, he snaps. "Did it suck? Sorry, I couldn't do what you did… I tried but damn I guess it caught me off guard. I mean, man, this thing is pretty hard I have to say, harder than what I thought." he babbles, and he knows that he sounds ridiculous and anxious. Billy is looking at him with a smirk, and looks like he's trying not to laugh again. Steve, apparently, can't stop talking. "But you… you're a pro! Well, obviously. You good at Basketball, good at school, you must be good at these kind of stuff too. Figures. Is there something where you're not good at?" finally, Billy interrupts his monologue with a quick, chaste, peck. Then, he talks a few inches from his face. "Princess. Shut up."

Steve gulps, watching the other boy leans back and moving his hands on his hips. "You got food in this mansion of yours? I'm starving." it's an unexpected question that completely changes the topic, but Steve realizes that, to be honest, Billy is kinda right. His stomach is grumbling too.

"What about we order pizza?"
"Atta-boy."

"The ending sucked." Billy spats, venomously, raising his can towards the big TV screen where the credits are scrolling. Steve shrugs, casually. "Yeah? Why's that?" "Harrington." Billy grimacea and turns to him. "All the androids are dead." he just says, as a matter of fact that can simply explain why the ending sucked.

Steve sighs and rolls his eyes, taking a sip from his beer. "Yeah, dude, it is the point of the movie. Harrison Ford kills the androids, he hunts them." "Yeah, but, they had all the reason to be angry with humans." Billy replies, firm. "Humans created them, planted memories and stuff, told them what to do… I would have done the same If I were one of them." Steve scoffs. "Yeah of course you would."

They're sitting on the big couch in the living room, surrounded by empty cans, pizza cartons, cigarettes and joints butts. After a discrete amount of beer and weed, they're kind of thrashed. But in a good way.

"I mean, you have a point…" Steve starts, pensive, trying to express the intricate thoughts that are going on in his brain. "…But… I don't know, man… the robots… they were kind of mean." Billy tsks him. "Harrington, are you seriously *judging* the robots for their actions?" Steve shakes his head. "No, no…. no, I'm not judging. But I think that you're kind of… too emotionally involved with the robots." "Emotionally involved?" "Yeah, like, you project your persona in them."

Billy blinks. Steve doesn't even know what the fuck he's saying, he's just babbling, his mind is blank and going in automatic mode. After a long time, Billy pushes him in the shoulder.

"Fuck you, Harrington. They're just cool. They dress cool and stuff." "Well, I hear that."

Then Steve looks at the clock on the wall and almost jumps when he realizes it's ten past midnight. "Shit." he hisses. A sudden wave of anxiety hits him, maybe amplified by the effect of the weed. "It's late. Shouldn't you get home?" Billy, against his previsions, just shrugs at this news. "Not really. Folks out all weekend." "Oh." Steve nods, absent-mindedly. Then, he remembers about Max and jumps again on the seat. "What about Max? Did you leave her alone? She's thirteen years old, Billy, you shouldn't…"

Billy groans, loud. "Relaax, would you, princess? She's having a lame pijama party with that kid El." "Oh." Steve nods again, finally relaxed and out of danger. "So… you're staying here?" he asks after a while, almost sheepishly. Billy looks at him with a lazy smirk. Then, he taps

his chin and makes a face.

"Let me think about it…"

Notes for the Chapter:

Feel free to drop a comment :)

11. I can't escape myself

Summary for the Chapter:

Musical debate & Power practice

Notes for the Chapter:

Yup. A lot of 80s alternative music culture in this story.

Billy wakes up grimacing at the beam of light that filters through the curtains directly to his face. He groans, annoyed, rolling to the other side to avoid that nuisance. The sheets are soft, impossibly soft, and the pillow smells something floral, something like… lavender? Wait a minute. That's definitely not his bed.

He gets up with a start that causes him dizziness, and looks around himself at the room. Last time he had woken up in a room that wasn't his it hasn't been too pleasant. Then, he remembers; it's Steve's room. He went to Steve's place the night before, they got high, drank, talked a lot, watched a great movie, and… did a lot of other stuffs that just the thought gives him an itching sensation to his belly.

He lays again, sighing, relieved. Then, he can't avoid noticing how empty is the spot next to him. But maybe that's better, it would have been quite odd to wake up next to another person. It's not something that had happened a lot in his past, and it's kind of… intimate.

What time is it? The light outside looks bright, must be late morning. He surrenders at the fact that he's now fully awake and finally leaves the way too comfortable king-size bed of Steve.

After a long, liberating pee and a quick wash, he goes down the stairs directed to the kitchen, barefoot and wearing just Steve's sweatpants. A nice smell teases his nostrils, while he can hear the music playing and Steve's voice over it.

Once arrived, the spectacle that appears to his sight is priceless: Steve is making pancakes, wearing just sweatpants and a plain t-shirt, while

singing aloud 'Take On Me' by A-ha. Billy leans on the doorjamb, arm crossed, watching interested the scene with a smirk plastered on his face.

When Steve finally notices him, he jumps on his spot, taken by surprise, making few dirty bowls falls from the counter. "Shit!" he hisses, kneeling to fix the mess. "Hey, uhm… morning. Didn't see you there." he mumbles, flushing badly. Billy's smirk transforms into a wolfish grin. "Oh, don't mind me, pretty boy. I was enjoying the show." "Yeah, whatever." Steve gains back some dignity and faces again the stove. Billy goes next to him and sits on the counter. "You making pancakes? Such a nice momma you are." he comments, maliciously. Steve shrugs casually, keep working on his pancakes. "Yeah, you know… you must learn how to cook a decent meal when you live most of the time alone." "So you're a good cook?" Steve shrugs again. He's being modest, Billy can tell. He's adorable.

"I got Italian relatives from my mother's side, so yeah, there's a lot of… cooking traditions or something." Steve casually explains. "Pretty sure pancakes aren't Italian, princess." Billy squabbles. Steve scoffs and looks at him, all cocky. "I know, dumbass, but wait to try my lasagna." at these words, Billy whistles, appreciative. "Are you trying to seduce me here, Stevie?"

Steve laughs. Then, he leans forward with his hands on Billy's knee, until their lips are separated by few inches. "Am I succeeding?" he asks, smirking. Billy keeps eye contact, like a challenge. Then, after a discrete amount of time, he playfully pushes Steve's face away.

"You're full of shit, Harrington."

In another time, in other circumstances, his words would have been mean, made just for hurting Steve, to get him angry, pissed off. But now, looks like there's no more space for the toxic will to dominate of Billy. Now, he can finally relax. Damn if he needed that.

"That's good shit, Harrington." Billy comments with his mouth half full.

They're eating outside, under the gazebo, near the pool. The weather

is warm but not too warm, perfectly balanced. With a sun like that, good pancakes made by a pretty boy and the slight summer breeze, even Hawkins looks kind of decent. Kind of.

Steve grimaces, annoyed. "Would you drop that Harrington stuff? Man, I had your dick in my mouth yesterday. Call me by my name, jeez." Billy scoffs and fulfills his mouth with another forkful of food. "Not gonna happen. Besides, is my dick in your mouth a table topic, Harrington?" "Sorry I forgot you're so keen on manners." for response, Billy just stares at him few seconds and burps soundly. Steve rolls his eyes. "Such a child." he spats, but there's no venom in his voice, he sounds more sincerely amused. "Mh. You love that." Billy talks again with his mouth full. "You're so good with children." he adds, as a matter of fact.

Steve giggles. "I guess you're right. This explains how come I am so good at handling you." Billy stops chewing, apparently surprised. Then, he smirks, tilting his head back in his trademark hawk pose. "Yeah, Stevie. You're so good at handling me." he purrs. Steve gulps and tries to disguise his embarrassment.

"What are you gonna do later?" Steve asks, while washing the dishes. Billy is seated again on the counter. He shrugs casually. "Dunno. Pick up the brat at the Byers, I guess." "Yeah, uhm, about that…" Steve squirms on his spot, sounding vaguely uneasy. "I kind of… promised El that I would convince you to stay there for a while."
Billy blinks, surprised. "Is that what you're doing now? Convincing me?" Steve rubs his neck and talks with high pitched voice. "Yeah, I mean… she wants to talk to you. To help you. With, you know, your… powers."

Billy scoffs. "That's stupid. I don't…" "You have freaky super-powers. Whether you like it or not." Steve interrupts him, sounding firm. Billy feels an odd sense of discomfort raising in his chest. Yes, unfortunately, that's true. That creepy nightmare of the Mind Flayer, the demodogs and all that freaky shit is far from being finished. He has almost forgotten about it, spending time with Steve doing normal stuff like kind of normal teenagers. But, he guesses he can't avoid his responsibilities for too long.

"Fine." he groans, in the end, making Steve instantly smiling like a goofy dork. "But no strange shit." he spats, venomous. Steve lifts an eyebrow in confusion. "What are you talking about?" Billy grits his teeth. "No sauna, no hot bath, no strange, creepy shit."

Steve stares at him wide-eyed, then, he can't help it, he burst into laughter.

Looks like it's not just about El and her idea of giving him power-management lessons. No.

When he jumps off Steve's Beemer, he notices immediately that all the weirdos crew is there. Every-fucking-body, except for Robin. He instantly wants to crawl into a hole at the idea of facing again all those people that have seen him at his worst, but Joyce Byers looks honestly pleased to see him, god knows why. She crushes him into a bone-crushing hug, chirping something like 'soo nice to see you Billy, sweetheart', leaving him dumbfounded and embarrassingly flushed.

Then, is El's turn to hug him (under Mike's annoying complaints), and he awkwardly pats her back, his body screaming to keep the distance. What's up with people touching him all of a sudden? He fucking hates physical contact, goddamit. Looks like Max has figured out that, because she's watching him with her snarky grin plastered on her face. Little bitch.

Nancy throws her arms to Steve's neck and Billy instantly wants to yell at her to back off, but he keeps back the urge simply chewing his cheek and tightening his fists. He glares at her with all the contempt in the world and nods quickly at Byers.

The guy, for some strange reason, pats one of his shoulders and decides to talk to him. Billy can't understand why. It's not that they are friends. It's not that they are enemies either, their relationship is just neutral.
"How are you doing, Hargrove?" he asks, and he doesn't sound exactly cheerful, but still, that's a strange interest in him. Billy shrugs. "Fine, I guess. Haven't puke alien creatures for a while." Jonathan chuckles, slightly amused. "Yeah, I guess that's kind of an improvement." "Y… yeah. I guess."

Shit. Why is he stuttering like a damn idiot?! Why is he feeling so uncomfortable between those losers?!

"You know…" Jonathan says casually, slipping his hands in his pockets. "…You still have my clothes."
Maybe that's why he's talking to him. Billy guesses that's better than a serious attempt to be his friend because clearly that's not gonna happen. Billy grimaces. "That's right. Remind me, or Max, to take them next time I'm gonna bring her to this… home." his voice comes out so forcefully polite that it's almost pathetic. He's literally melting inside while he keeps back his usual asshole self, but he doesn't want to give problems or getting that idiot Harrington mad, so he needs to keep a clean face.
Jonathan nods. Jeez. That guy looks like an addicted. Billy has seen junkies with a better face than him in Cali.

"I love that shirt. Ramones have been one of the first bands that I discovered." Byers explains casually, even If, well, who the fuck has ever asked him that, but Billy has to behave. He can see Nancy and Steve give them a quick curious glance, but they look really involved in some sort of deep conversation. "I'm not very into that classic punk-rock bullshit." Billy briefly declares.

"Songs end in like, two minutes and they're all happy and stupid." at this statement, Jonathan chuckles, almost sheepishly. "Yeah. I heard you blasting heavy metal from your car."
That's actually something that makes him proud, the fact that, wherever he goes, everyone notices him. "I think everyone did, Byers." he sniffles, try not to look too cocky, and that's kind of impossible for him because it's just his nature. But Jonathan doesn't look too afflicted, in fact, he snaps on his spot, suddenly enlightened. "I think I got something you could like! I bought some tapes that are kind of too hardcore for my ears, wanna check it out?"

Billy blinks. Like. What the actual fuck? He glances at Steve, that looks all still involved with the prissy bitch, while the brats are out of sight and Joyce has gotten back in home. With a long, mental, shrug, he decides to see what the freak Byers has got.

"SWEET!" Billy can't contain his excitement when he grabs 'Reign In

Blood' by Slayers. His eyes are practically glowing while Byers chuckles at the sight. "That one? I don't like it. It's way too… much. You can have it." Billy tightens the grip on the tape, trying to keep back the nervous energy that is spreading through his veins.

"Seriously?!" he asks, and he knows that he sounds like a fucking child. Byers smile and nods. "Yup. It's all yours. Use it well." Shit. He kind of want to kiss the guy right now. Or hug him. But he doesn't do any of those things and just squirms on his spot. "Shit. Thanks Byers… I owe you one." "Yeah… don't worry about it."

Billy resumes his research through the tapes, looking for good ones. Ok, Byers… he could be kind of ok. Kind of. He has at least decent taste in music, differently from all the preppy kids and cows of that shithole town. Moreover, Billy has to admit that Byers actually is sort of a nice guy, like, really kind and stuff. Like his little brother, who is Billy's favorite one between the group of the brats. Joyce seems like a nice person too. They are all nice in that family and he has caused all the sort of problems in their house…
A strange sense of guilt raises in him. He's zoning out, staring at the tapes dumbly, when Jonathan's voice snaps him from the spiraling of his thoughts.

"What about Bad Brains? They're not metal but I think you could like them." Jonathan suddenly appears next to him, looking for a specific tape in the self. "Bad Brains? Name is not new." Billy declares. Then, when he looks at the tape that Jonathan has just picked up, his memories finally resurfaces. "Oh, yeah! I recognize the graphic! I know them!" he takes the tape and twists it to read the songs on the back. "They're cool, aren't they?" Jonathan asks, with a smirk. Billy is concentrated on the reading and doesn't respond, then, he snaps.

"Actually…" he talks, pensive. "I think I could have heard them live." "No shit. seriously?!" Billy grins at the surprised reaction of the other boy. "Yeah. I kinda used to sneak in a lot of concerts in San Diego… I dated a g… girl that used to organize gigs and stuff." Jonathan gasps, his face is amusing. "That's… that's fucking cool!" he declares, after a while, and Billy doesn't know what is more strange, to have this conversation with the former weirdo of the school or the fact that now Jonathan is looking at him like he admires him and that's something Billy would have never guessed.

"Are they, like… all black? The singer has dreadlocks?" Billy asks, just to verify, but he's pretty sure that the band is definitely one of the ones that he has heard live. Jonathan nods vigorously. "Yeah, yeah! Definitely!" "So yeah I've been at one of their gigs. They are mad, man! Pure madness. I heard they're like, into some weird cult or something…" "You mean Rastafarianism? That's not a cult, actually, it's is a religion…" "No shit. aren't them all junkies?" "They just smoke weed. It's part of the religion." "You're shitting me." "No, no, I swear."

Billy is about to speak back, when he notices Steve and Nancy grinning at the doorjamb. Shit. That's embarrassing.

"Go on. You guys are cute." Steve says, gesturing in their direction. Billy scoffs. "Screw you, Harrington. You're just jealous 'cause I've found someone that has better taste in music than you." Billy can see, with the corner of his eye, that Jonathan is flushing slightly. Steve shrugs and rolls his eyes. "Whatever, man. This kind of discussion could take us forever, but, unfortunately, we haven't much time. You're here for a reason, and El is waiting for you in the backyard."

Shit. Billy has almost forgotten about El. When it comes to music, he tends to forget about everything else. He gives a last look to Byers, mumbling, almost embarrassed:"Thanks again for the tape, man." then, he surpasses Steve and Nancy on the doorjamb, but only after making sure to give her a not too strong but neither too friendly shove on the shoulder, leaving her gasping dumbfounded and outraged.

El is waiting for him seated on the grass, legs crossed and a concentrated frown on her face. She's almost adorable like this. Billy sighs and sits in front of her, hands on his thighs.

"Sorry for making you wait, kiddo." "It's ok." El shrugs, talking with her weird flat tone of voice. "Are you ready?" she asks, serious. Billy gulps. Is not that he exactly knows what they're gonna do, so he can't say that he feels ready for the unknown. But, there is a thing that is certain: he fucking doesn't want the crowd of kids staring at them. Why they must always stick together in a pack? It's like, it's impossible to interact with one of them alone.

"What do you want to do?" he questions, hesitation in his voice. "Talk to you. In the void. You can talk in the void too, like me." El explains, and Billy actually doesn't understand a shit. "Later, you can try your power. On someone else." she adds. Steve, who's sitting next to them, immediately offers himself as a volunteer. What a brave hero.
"I don't know, kid…" Billy bites his lip nervously. "Might be dangerous." El shakes her head. "Don't worry. I'm here, with you. Everything will be ok."
Billy looks at her in silence, he can't avoid feeling a primordial sensation of fear about all that thing they're going to try. He has never used his powers willingly; it was always something that came out casually in a situation of immediate danger.

He sighs, defeated. "Ok." then, he looks at the crowd of the brats and points at them. "But they need to stay back. I don't want too many people around us. Just me, you, and Steve." El nods without hesitation. "Ok. It's alright."

Max scoffs, apparently offended. "What?! You prefer Steve than me to stay close to you?!" at this lame whining, Billy rolls his eyes. "He offered to be the rat-lab of this little experiment, shitbird. Unless you want to take his place, you're dismissed." she huffs but spats an irritated 'fine!', crossing her arms.

El turns to her friend and tells them to step back. "Are you sure about this?" of course the little Wheeler has to bitch about it. El doesn't flinch. "Yes. Do as I say."
Finally, they make few steps back, leaving just Billy, Steve and El, seated in a small circle.

"How… are we going to do this?" Billy asks, not able to hide the tension in his voice. "You close your eyes. End empty your mind." El orders. Then, she pulls out a blindfold from the pocket of her salopettes and starts to put it on her eyes with sharp movements. Billy is staring at her between curiosity and awe. The kid looks so serious that she's kind of freaking him out.

"How should I empty my mind? Like… meditate or something?"
"Don't think. Close your eyes."

Billy gives a last glance to Steve, that shrugs, an expression

suggesting something like 'do what she says, dude', then, he finally closes his eyes. At first, he just focuses on his breathing, trying to slow it down and relax. He thinks how he must look fucking idiotic on the outside.

Some time passes, maybe minutes, and nothing happens. Billy is starting to lose hope. Maybe they were wrong about him, maybe he can't do the kind of shit that El does.
But, just when he's about to open his eyes and say 'screw it', he hears that. It's a voice, it's El's voice, distant and muffled, like underwater noise. He tries to concentrate and follow the source of the sound, making it clearer.

And, that's it. He's sitting in the dark, nothing around him but a little girl who's smirking.

"Hi, Billy." she greets, while he squirms on his spot, surprised by the sudden transfer in that empty place that doesn't even feel real. "Shit…" he hisses. "Where are we?" "The void. You've been here. You saw me here, before."
It does look kind of familiar, even if it's difficult to figure it out. How can you have memories of a place that doesn't even exist in reality? How can you recognize a dimension disconnected from time and space?

"What's this place? I mean… are we… in our brains, or…?" Billy can't hide his confusion. "Not brain. But here is where the thoughts are. Here is… the place of the minds. You can talk to me in the void, because you can be here too." El sounds goddamn sure about it, as if that story doesn't seem freaky nuts. Billy sighs and rubs his eyes with the palms of his hands, and, shit, it does feel real. Even if it's not.

"Now it's your turn." El announces. "You find Steve." at these words, Billy gasps, shocked. "Steve? How the hell am I supposed to do that?" "You focus. Think of him. His face. Just think of finding him." sure she makes it sounds easy…

Billy closes his eyes and does what he's been told. When he opens them, Steve is sitting next to him, looking in his direction, a concerned frown on his pretty face.
"Steve?!" Billy instinctively reaches a hand towards him, but he finds

his arm passing through the boy's body, like he's transparent, as a ghost.
"He can't hear you." El explains, getting on her feet behind Steve and proving her point waving her hand in front of the boy's face. "We are in the void." she adds, as a matter of fact.
"If he can't see us right now, why is he looking at me?" Billy asks, gesturing at him. El smirks playfully. "Because he's always looking at you." Billy smiles, feeling a little heat in his cheeks.

"I want you to use the Flyer Power to him." "How?" "Focus. Think of your… consciences. Together. Like you're two bodies but a single soul."
Billy closes his eyes again and tries to do what he's been told. He can hear El's voice talking again next to him.
"When you are… ready, connected, you tell him what to do. Try small things, like raising an arm, make some steps. Let's start with something easy."
Something easy, she says.

"You think they're talking in the void?" Lucas asks, looking at the trio few meters away. "I don't know… sure we can't see any difference, from here. They're just sitting with their eyes closed, do nothing, for at least ten minutes." Max comments. El has some blood dripped from her nose, but for the rest, she seems pretty ok. Billy… well, Max can easily say that it's way too odd to see him this motionless and silent, so she hopes he has managed to 'get in the void'.

Something changes when Steve, who has been staring contemplatively at them for all the time, suddenly changes the expression on his face, becoming an emotionless, blank looking automaton.

El takes off the blindfold and looks at Steve with a small, satisfied smirk. Billy opens his eyes too, and his glance is different, his eyes seem glassy, while creepy, black veins start to appear through the skin of his neck.

"Make him stand." El orders, getting on her feet herself. Billy turns slightly to Steve, pointing his knees on the grass. Red blood starts to drip from his nose too, while Steve gets up with a sharp movement,

standing promptly like a soldier, his face unreadable.

El nods. "Good. Make him raise his left arm." Steve does that, slowly but steadily.
"Holy shit…" Dustin hisses, trying to keep back an excited grin on his face. "That's so, fucking, awesome!"
"Good. Good." El moves in front of Steve, looking at him, concentrated. Max wishes they could get closer to observe better the scene. Steve's face… it's so weird, unrecognizable. There's no trace of emotion, he looks like a meat puppet.

El keeps staring at Steve, like he's a complex equation that needs to be solved, but something odd starts to happen to Billy. Max can tell, even from distance; her stepbrother is starting to tremble, slightly, and his breathing is accelerating. It looks like he's making an effort in keeping Steve under his mental control.

"El!" Max calls her, making some steps ahead. "There's something wrong with Billy. You need to stop, now!" El turns to face him. At that moment, Will touches the back of his neck with wide eyes. "Guys… I… I can feel it. It's coming." everybody looks at him in awe, but then, a sudden shocked exclamation catches their attention.

Steve is grabbing El's forearm, clenching it. El tries to wriggle out from the grip, distraught. "Steve… Steve you're hurting me! Leave me!" she complains, trying to loosen the other boy's tight grip with her good hand. Mike instantly rushes to them and tries to push Steve away, failing the attempt.

"Hey! Leave her! She said you're hurting her!"

But Steve is not Steve anymore at that moment, neither Billy is himself. Max grabs Lucas's shoulders, panicked. "Do something!"
"What should I do?!" she scoffs, then, an insane idea strikes her head. Looks like she always needs to solve that kind of situation. You can't trust boys.

She grabs her skateboard, bolts to Steve and hits his back with the board, using all her force. Steve finally snaps, leaving El's arm and making an annoyed protest.
"Ouch! What the fuck, Max?! Are you insane?!"

Max looks at him wide-eyed, her skate still grabbed and ready to hit again.
Seems like he's okay, they're out of danger. El hugs Mike, scared and upset by the recent development, while Billy blinks and gasps in shock, still on his knees on the grass, looking totally disoriented.

Mike turns to him with a disgusted scowl on his face. "Why did you do that?! You're a fucking psycho, you know that?!" Billy is breathing hard and looks on the verge to cry. "I don't know… I didn't mean to…" he whispers. Will squeezes Mike's shoulder and talks firmly. "Mike. I don't think he did it on purpose." Mike scoffs and rudely shoves him off. "So what?! He's still flayed again?! I told you he was trouble. This guy is dangerous, stop giving him credits, stop idolize him! He's not Spiderman… he's fucking Venom!"
Max makes the most theatrical roll of eyes. "Oh, Mike, please. Drop this, you're the one that's acting psycho here." El tries to reassure her boyfriend. "It's ok, Mike. I'm fine. He didn't mean to." "IT'S NOT OK!"

They instantly start to shout at each other, like they always do. Billy just stands up and walks away. Steve, that has stayed silent, looks at him concerned. He apologizes to El and rushes away to reach him.

He finds Billy with his back pressed to the sidewall, breathing raggedly, trying to keep back his rising panic attack. Steve's heart instantly jumps at the sight. He grabs the boy's cheeks; their faces separated by barely few inches.

"I can't do this… Steve… I can't do this… Don't make me do this…" Billy stutters, looking again like the small, frail boy that Steve had found crying in the shower. "It's ok. Nothing happened. Everyone is alright." Steve makes their front collides, trying to pass some of his strength to him. Billy shakes his head, few tears start to drop from his wide eyes.

"No, no… I… It was back. It wasn't me, I swear, Steve I swear, I didn't mean to…" Steve sighs. "I know. Believe me. I know."
They stay like this for a while, just breathing the same air at a small distance, then Billy looks finally calmer. Steve caresses his cheek, his hair, carefully, like he's precious, made of glass. Then, he kisses the side of his mouth, his chin, slowly, tentatively. Billy snaps from his

reverie and rushes his mouth to Steve's, leaving him pleasantly surprised. The kiss that follows is sweet and kind of desperate. Anyone could run into them, but they're too involved to think that.

Their mouth separate, searching for air, but they're still front to front, nose to nose, Steve's hands solidly on the boy's cheeks.
"It's going to be alright. We will figure this out. I got you, baby." Steve whispers, finding Billy chuckling at this statement, and he knows that he's better now. "Baby? Where does it come from?" he asks, amused. Steve shivers and interrupts the physical contact, feeling stupid all of a sudden. Is that too much?

"Uhm… sorry. You don't like it"-he rubs his neck, now feeling all awkward. Billy stares at him maliciously, with a wolfish grin plastered on his face.
"I didn't say that." he declares, after a time that Steve feels definitely too long. Steve makes a small laugh. "Ok. Good." "Good."

They stare at each other without saying anything. Those piercing, breath-taking beautiful blue eyes are literally making Steve melt from the inside.
"I want to kiss you again." he declares, brutally honest. Billy smirks. His eyes are still glassy and his cheeks wet for tears, but he definitely looks more like himself, with that trademark expression on his cute face. Steve wants definitely to devour him. Literally. Devour. Every. Piece. Of. Him.
"Nobody is stopping you, pretty boy."

"We are back!"

Susan chirps all cheerful, entering the house followed by Neil. Max and Billy are sitting at the kitchen table, she's writing something on a notepad, her algebra book next to her.
"Welcome home, mum, Neil!" she greets, all smiling like a cute doll, while Billy politely says:"Welcome home, sir, Susan."

This scene must be really shocking for Neil, who is standing dumbfounded in front of them, blinking in the attempt to understand what is going on. "How was auntie Anna?" Billy asks, even if he obviously doesn't give a flying fuck. Susan giggles, looking like a

nervous birdie, as usual.

"Oh, you know her. Always involved with the church project, she can't find the time for herself. But she's alright. The kids are fine too." Billy nods, faking interest, then, Susan looks at her daughter. "She asked me so much about you, Maxine!" "Yeah? Well, I guess we will see each other at Christmas…" she mumbles.

Neil hasn't stop glaring at Billy, like he's trying to find out where is the swindle in that strangely domestic scene. "What are you doing?" he asks, almost accusatory, gesturing at them. Max answers quickly for him. "Billy is helping me with homework." she explains, putting a fake, kind-of-sweet-girl smile on her face. "Homework?" Neil repeats, and damn, he really looks shocked. Billy wishes he could laugh at him, but it would cost him dearly.

"Yeah, algebra." Max points out. Susan reacts with excessive pretentious enthusiasm. "Oh, that's so kind of you, Billy!" but Neil isn't convinced yet. "You good in this?" he asks, skeptical, like believing that his son is good in something it's simply too much. Billy responds casually, try not to sound too sassy. "I got A- in Calculus, sir." yeah, here's another thing. No matter how good his grades are, Neil would always be disappointed.

He glares at Billy for a while, searching for something venomous to say, but in evident lack of reason to be angry, he sighs, almost defeated. "Good job, son." he exhales without any trace of kindness.
"Thanks, sir." Billy says without any trace of gratitude.

He expects them to be done here, but Neil isn't finished yet. "I need to talk to you, Billy." he announces, and Billy can't avoid feeling the grip of anxiety in his throat. What now? He behaved, they can't possibly know about his weekend with Steve. If Neil knew, he wouldn't have been this collected in talking to him. That's for sure. Even thou, there's gotta be something bad if his dad wants to speak to him privately. It's not that they speak at all.

They move in the corridor, Billy trying to keep a straight face. He hasn't done anything bad. No need to act suspicious. Neil has an unreadable expression on his face, Billy can't really decipher if he's pissed off or not and this makes him scared like a pussy.

"Frank called me Friday."
What the fuck?
"Frank?" Billy repeats, dumbly. Who the fuck is Frank?
"The mechanic."
The mechanic? Does that mean that he simply wants to talk about the Camaro? Shiiit. Billy internally sighs in relief. He stays silent, waiting for his father to go on.

"Your car is ready to be picked up."
Holy fucking shit. Yes, yes, fucking yes!

Billy grins in happiness, unable to keep back the joy caused by the news. Neil doesn't smile back, instead, he looks at him severely. "You're going to pick it up tomorrow. It's good that you have it back before school starts, so you can drive your sister again." "Yes, sir." Billy snaps with way too much energy. Neil gives him a long, suspicious, glare. Then, he pats his shoulder, making him almost flinch at the contact. Billy hates himself for that, he's always a jumpy puppy when it comes to face his old-man.

"Another thing, Billy." Neil speaks. "That girl you're seeing, I want to know her. If she's so important to you, you should have the decency to introduce her to your family, don't you think?"
Billy swallows, tense. "Yes, sir." he speaks in a whisper.

"Why don't you invite her over for dinner? Let's say, on Sunday?"
And it's not an offer, it's an order. Billy nods, but he's internally freaking the hell out.

"Yes, sir. She will be thrilled."
Thrilled. Gosh. He feels so fucking pathetic.

Neil makes a small, horrible smirk, and pats his shoulder again, vigorously. "Good. Can't wait to meet her." finally, he walks away, leaving Billy a panicking mess.
He's fucked. He's literally, deeply *fucked*.

Notes for the Chapter:

> I was really looking forward to insert a scene where Billy and Jonathan bond over music!

El is Yoda master. Billy is an involutary Padawan.

12. California Uber Alles

Summary for the Chapter:

New tensions & Californian teenage angst

Steve is surprised to see Nancy enter the store. She smiles at him, sweetly, holding the strap of her bag. She looks good, kind of career woman alike. The Hawkins Post job has given her a new professionality.

"Hey." she greets, standing in front of the counter. "Hey, Nance. It's nice to see you." even if they have met the day before at the Byers, but it's not that they had so many occasions to talk recently, between their jobs and their… obligations. Nancy and Robin share a small, polite salute.

"Are you here for the movies or…?" Steve questions, almost awkwardly. She shakes her head sheepishly in response. "No, no. Actually, I wanted to talk with you. About… upside-down things." her voice trails off, hesitant, as if she doesn't know how to behave in front of Robin. But she's involved in that story too, so, it's not that Nancy has to be secretive about it.

"Oh. Yeah. Great, I mean, ok." Steve stutters.

Nancy had obviously noticed his brand new 'friendship' with Billy (if only she knows), and hasn't kept for herself some sort of lecture the day before, declaring herself as "worried" about his choices in matter of friends. Steve had felt quite irritated about that, she doesn't know Billy and if there's a person that can't allow to tell him who avoid and who befriend with according to a history of beatings, that's her, considering that Jonathan has beat the shit out of him himself. Ok, that was another circumstance, and Steve kind of deserved that, but still… can't she believe that people deserve a second chance?

Ok, maybe Billy has never been too nice to her. Steve has noticed how the guy has given her the most venomous, nasty glares, how he tends to be particularly rude when he talks to her, how he basically is more of an asshole than usual in her presence.

"Well…" she tightens the grip on the bag, keeping on a forced smile. "…I think I figured out where the other demodogs could be."" she declares, making Steve pleasantly surprised. "Nance, that's great! How do you know that?" "I heard stuff at the post. Apparently, Mr. Judd, a farmer who lives a little outside the town, woke up with all his herd exterminated this morning." "Shit…" both Robin and Steve hisses, their mouth in an 'o' shape.

"Yeah… he's quite devastated. They talk about a wolf-pack, or bears, but we all know what is responsible." Steve sighs and rubs his eyes with the palm of his hands. "Yeah. It can only be demodogs. We need to go today, tonight." they share a complicit gaze, now tremendously serious.

"What about Hargrove… Billy." Nancy speaks, hesitant, correcting herself. Steve lifts an eyebrow, confused. "What about him?" "Can you… contact him, ask him to join us?" that's… a good question. Steve has no idea how to reach him, considering that calling at his home is totally forbidden due to his asshole father. Maybe he can try to speak to Max through the receiver, as he has already done a couple days before.

"I can try. But… you know. He's kind of unpredictable. Appearing and disappearing like a Rockstar." Steve finds himself smirking while he says so. Robin scoffs. "I guess he will pass here to the store before the end of the day." Steve looks at her questioningly. "How do you know?" she rolls her eyes. "It's not that you two guys can stay distant from each other for less than 24 hours, dingus. You two are practically glued together."

Steve swallows, squirming awkwardly on his seat. It's not safe to make that kind of implication in front of Nancy, he hasn't told her yet about his new… thing. He wouldn't even know what to tell. What are he and Billy? Friends? Lovers? Boyfriends? If Steve could choose, he would definitely go to the third…

"Dingus?" Robin claims his attention, noticing how he has started to space out. Steve snaps, flushing slightly. "Yeah! Uhm… so, I guess we could meet at the parking lot, down the hill. Does six o'clock sound good to you?" he stutters, maybe a little too fast. Nancy nods. "Yeah… it's fine. I'm going to tell Jonathan. And, Steve…" she looks

at Robin then at him again, vaguely uncomfortable. "…Could I… Could I talk to you for a second? I mean… in private?"

Robin sure doesn't need a second request, she smirks and jumps on her feet. "Sounds important. I'll leave you guys alone." before Steve can reply anything, she's already disappeared through the shelves. He sighs. That doesn't sound good, Nancy wants surely to lecture him about something, he can tell by her concerned frown.
"Steve…" she starts, almost whispering. Now she's really giving him anxiety. "I saw you." she declares, after a while. "I saw you… yesterday."

Steve gives her a questioning look. "Yep, we pretty much saw each other at the Byers, If I recall correctly." Nancy shakes her head, making her curls moving. "No. Steve. What I'm trying to say…" her voice trails off, then, she sighs, tired. "…I saw you and Billy. Together." Steve scoffs. Why is she acting all strange suddenly? Yeah, of course they were together, what's the big deal…

Ouch.

Suddenly, Steve has an illumination. She's talking about them together… *together*.

"You saw us making out?!" Steve snaps, high pitched voice. Nancy instantly reddens, embarrassed. "I didn't want to be this direct, but, yes. That's what I saw. You guys weren't even hiding properly, to be honest."

Well… Amen to that. Steve had the intention to talk to her about that, sooner or later. It's not the end of the world if she had witnessed them while they were kissing.
Steve looks away and shrugs, rubbing his neck awkwardly. "Yeah, I was going to tell you… it's a new thing. I mean, I don't even know if it's a thing, to be honest. I… I don't know, Nance. It's kind of messed up." Nancy sighs, her big eyes all frowning in a concerned expression, as if she has just find out that he has a serious illness or something like that. "Steve… I'm just worried about you. I hope you know what you're doing. He's not a good person. Besides the things he did when he was possessed… he's cruel. Seriously, I don't how he tricked you, but…" "Tricked?!" Steve makes an ugly laugh. "This is hilarious,

Nance! Seriously, do you hear yourself? Shit…"

He pinches the bride of his nose, exhaling a long breath between his teeth, exhausted. "What's up with you people? Are you like my father, or what? Can you fucking let me do my choices and leave me the hell alone?!" now he's yelling at her, and damn, that feels weird. He's not the type of person to get angry so easily, it's more like the contrary… he accumulates, and accumulates, and eventually implode.

Nancy gasps like a fish, shocked by his sudden outburst. "I'm… I'm sorry… I didn't mean to…" "It's fine." Steve sighs and slides a hand to his face, tired by that conversation. They look at each other awkwardly for some seconds, both of them don't know what to say. Then, an annoying voice breaks the silence.

"Nancy Wheeler."

They turn towards the source, finding Keith staring at them a few meters away, eating chips loudly from a bag. Nancy makes a forced smile. "Hey… Keith." "Your brother still owe me ten bucks from the Arcade." he puts a chip in his mouth vigorously, as if he's remarking how disturbing that fact is. Nancy keeps on with her way too fake smile. "Yeah… I'll remind him that." Keith nods, then, he turns to Steve. "Back to work, Harrington. You're not paid to chatting with the customers all day." then, after the usual nasty scowl, he leaves. That guy is going to give Steve a big migraine.

"I'll see you later." he tells Nancy, the corners of his mouth are lifted in a smile, but there's still bitterness in his face. It's not good to leave her like this, things left unsolved. Nancy nods. "Yeah… catch you later, Steve." she leaves, a new sense of guilt is rising in Steve's chest. He has been rude, ok. Maybe he has exaggerated a little. But how dare she tells him what to do or what it's the best for him? She can't think to have still this sort of control over his life. That's not fucking fair.

Robin reaches him to the counter, sitting on her usual spot. She's glaring at him questioningly, so Steve speaks, telling her what she wants to hear.
"She saw me and Billy, kissing." Robin blinks, shocked. "And…? What

did she tell you?" Steve sighs and leans forward to the counter, pointing his elbows. "What do you think? The usual. That he's a bad person, that she's just worried for me…" Robin stays silent, and maybe she honestly doesn't know what to say. She had been the first to tell the same about Billy. Does she have changed her mind?

Out of nowhere, she pats his shoulder, empathetic. "You know what? Screw her. He makes you happy, that's all you should care about. She will understand, eventually." Steve lifts his head to see her, a sad, puppy look in his eyes. "You sure?" "I'm sure, dingus." "So you have changed your mind about him?" at these words, Robin sighs. "I might have… misjudged him." Steve smirks, satisfied. "Really?" Robin rolls her eyes. "I mean. He's an asshole, no doubt." she explains. "But… I think that he has more under that thick skin of macho bullshits. And, I don't know, but looks like he got you good."

Steve laughs, flushing slightly. "Yeah. He got me good."

Robin was right. As usual. When is she not right?

Billy arrives at Family Video at about 5 PM. But there's something different, something new, or better, something old: the loud roar of the Camaro's engine makes everyone turn to the source of the sound in the store, while noisy, way too fast and high-volume heavy metal blasts from the car's speakers.

Billy enters like he owns the place, catching everyone's attention, while his figure is practically glowing with pure, masculine, pheromones. He's wearing a Metallica shirt with the sleeves cut up, tight denim jeans and biker boots. Steve practically jumps to him, surpassing the counter with a gigantic smile spread on his face.

"It's back!" he chirps, pointing the car through the window. Billy grins. "No shit, Harrington. My baby is back, now I'm a complete man." Steve has the urge to kiss him, or at least hug him, but he keeps that to himself, even if he's squirming in his spot.

"And… that's not all. I got a job!" Billy announces, slapping a hand to the counter, way too strong. "What? What about the pool?" Steve questions, confused. Billy scoffs and leans loosely with his on the

counter, pointing his elbow and crossing his legs. "Pool is closed, genius. Summer ends early in this shithole town." well… Steve guesses it must be different in California. Especially in San Diego.

"I went to the workshop to pick up the Camaro… and this guy, Frank, was very talkative. So we started looking at the cars, talking about those stuffs, and he told me that he needs a hand for a few afternoons per week. So… I'll be that hand. Basic stuff, but I'm good with cars and that kind of shit."

Steve squeezes his shoulder, enthusiast. "That's great, man! I'm happy for you." Billy shrugs and sniffles. "Well, you know, pretty boy… I really need cash and a way to have my old-man out of my life. So, yeah, I guess I'm happy too."

For a moment, they share a pure, glad smile, just looking at their eyes without saying anything. Then, Billy is the first one to break the silence, whacking again the surface of the counter. "We need to celebrate!" he points to Steve and Robin, the last one has just stayed silent with her trademark sarcastic expression on her face all the time.
"What do you do after work? I'm taking you out for a drink." he leans forward toward Robin, giving her a nasty glare. "You too, Buckley. Don't be a lame nerd." "Actually." she spats, getting closer to Billy. "We're all settled for today, and we were wondering if you care to join us on another, exciting, adventure."

Billy blinks, confused, turning to Steve in searching for explanations. He shrugs. "Monster hunting. We know where are located the demodogs that we haven't killed yet." at these words, Billy groans, loudly, dramatically. "A man cannot relax in this Twilight Zone town." "No shit, Hargrove." Robin convenes, grinning. "So… you with us?" asks Steve.
Billy slides his hands to his face and sighs. "Fine. I guess I don't have much choice after all." "You don't." Robin agrees. "We could always… have a drink in my place, after the hunting." Steve proposes, finding instant approval in Billy. "That sounds more interesting, princess." "Jeez… I don't know if I can stand you two all the evening long…" Robin complains, but it's clear she's just joking, her mouth is cracked in a smirk.

"Oh, sweetheart. You're just scared you could like it." Billy purrs, approaching lasciviously to her. "You wish, Hargrove. And I told you to not fucking call me that!" "Welcome to the club…" Steve sighs.

They can't continue their chatting; that annoying voice is back again, always intervening when his owner sees Steve relaxing too much.

"Hargrove." Keith spats, venomous. This time he's eating a sandwich. Billy glares daggers at him, like he's saying 'come on, I dare you', but the guy is far from being intimidated. "I guess I couldn't expect someone else from a guy like you, Harrington." he hisses, looking at Steve. Then, it's Robin's turn. "Robin, you told me Steve would have brought girls here, but what I've seen is a bunch of kids, his ex and the worst asshole in Hawkins."

Robin flushes, embarrassed, while Billy literally burst into laughter. Then, he gestures at Steve, still chuckling. Steve tightens his jaw in annoyance. God. He's such an asshole. "Harrington? Girls? You know how much is that he hasn't got laid, man?" at these words, Steve scoffs. "I think you pretty know when is the last time I got laid." Billy turns to him, blushing, an outraged expression on his face. Steve smirks. *I got ya, asshole!*

"I don't wanna know." Keith declares, dismissing them with a wave of the hand. "But if you're not here to rent a movie, Hargrove, I need to ask you to leave."
Steve and Robin freeze, looking worried at how Billy might react to this. However, the guy looks calm, almost poker-face.

"I do am here to rent a movie." he hisses, all venomous and intimidating. "Actually, I have a few in the car to give it back. Then, I'm going to choose a new one, and I will take all the time in the world. And you-" he points at Keith. "-you ain't gonna say shit. Because I'm a customer. And the customer is always right." Keith lifts an eyebrow, a disgusted expression on his face. "Very well, Hargrove." he just says after a while, finally twisting and leaving them without adding a world.

Steve sighs in relief. That was close.

They all meet at the parking lot under the big hill. Billy has followed Steve's Beemer impatiently, dangerously driving few meters from the other car's butt, frustrated by the guy's slowness (giving him a honk eventually to point out that).

He finds the priss Nancy and the freak Byers already waiting for them, leaning to the guy's car, arm crossed. He jumps off the Camaro and watches the view around him without hiding his scorn.

"The fuck is this place?" he spats, while lighting a cigarette. Nancy sighs, looking already tired by the boy's presence. "Countryside. The farm that has been attacked it's not far away from here, so, the monsters must be in the nearby." she explains, patiently. Billy scoffs, disgusted. "Yeah I can smell cowshit. Let's make it quick, I really don't want to do this." Nancy rolls her years. "You're not the only one, Hargrove."

Steve and Robin reach them, getting off the Beemer. Billy can't avoid noticing how there's tension between the brunette and the priss, they greet awkwardly, with a forced smile. Then, Steve turns to him, a grimace on his face. "You've been on my ass for all the ride, Billy. Can't you not drive like a maniac for once in your life?!" "Not my fault if you drive worse than my grandma. And she's six feet under."

Then, Billy snaps, remembering something. "Byers, I got something for ya." he tells the boy, who lifts an eyebrow in surprise. Billy opens the passenger's door of the Camaro and reaches something that rudely throws to Jonathan, who catches it with a last-minute rush. He looks at the tape with a concentrated frown, then, he makes a small laugh. "Dead Kennedys! How do you know I like them?! I was looking for this album!" he seems genuinely happy and surprised, while Billy is acting uncaring, as if it's too hard to acknowledge that he's doing a nice gesture for someone else.

"Intuition. You can have it, I never listen to it, they're not my type. My ex gave it to me." he spats, almost aggressively, while Steve gives him a questioning look. Yup. His ex. No fucking questions.

Byers smiles sheepishly. "Thanks, Billy! That's so nice of you." looks like he hits a nerve because Billy groans back, all irritated by the implication of being 'nice'. "Don't sweat it, man."

Steve appears next to him with a grumpy face. "You gave him a present! You never gave me a present. Why him and not me? I'm hurt!" Billy rolls his eyes. "My tolerance of your person is your present, Harrington." besides, he's wrong: Billy has given him a customized mixtape, that is way better than a tape that he doesn't even listen to.
Meanwhile, Nancy's face is awesome: she looks outraged, with her mouth slightly open and her big eyes in an angry frown. She's surely asking herself why she's the only person who Billy treats like shit in the group.

Robin approaches Jonathan and starts to look at the tape, interested. "'Fresh Fruit For Rotting Vegetables'…" she reads. "I need to take a listen to this band." Billy sniffles. "They're from Cali. Like every fucking good band in this country."

Nancy decides to finally intervene. "Guys, that's cool. But shall we go monster hunting now?"

Billy glares at her with pure hate, but they eventually start to walk through the path in the forest. After not much time, Steve grabs his bicep and drags him aside. "Who's your ex? Is it a… he?" he asks, with a pensive frown. Billy rolls his eyes. "We're not gonna talk about it." "Now? Or… ever?" "Ever, dipshit."

Steve sighs, a puppy eye looking on his face. "You know everything about my ex. I want to know something about the old… you." the hurt expression of Steve's face kind of makes something moving in Billy's guts, something like sorrow. But it's not that he could ever, ever want to talk about Nathan. He's still trying not to think too much about that douchebag. The painful thing is that he hasn't thrown away anything of the boy. All the tapes, the letters, the pictures, ticket concerts, even the guy's clothes… everything is still there, and Billy feels only ashamed of it. Like he hasn't been able yet to forget about the boy, even after all the low blows that he did to him.

He's sure that Nathan has completely forgotten about his person. He will have gone on, living his life as a fucking punk poser as he is. Organizing gigs, fucking boys secretly, being adored by everyone like a goddamn king.

There was a time where Billy has been the king too, with him, together. He has reached the sky, lived the most intense moments in his life, discovering everything: sex, drugs, music, friendship, love. He had a crowd of friends, he was respected and feared. And then… the empire fell. Everything he had disappeared, Billy has found himself out of friends, isolated, and lonely.

Yep. Nathan had pretty much broken his heart, if he ever had one.

"No way."

The big bald man grunts with evident disgust, looking Billy from top to button. Billy grits his teeth and tights his fists, feeling an aching sensation in his knuckles.
"Let me in." he orders, hissing between his teeth. "Are you deaf, kid? I said no. Get lost." Billy doesn't flinch and doesn't move. He stays there, in front of the shady guy, his feet planted and his fists ready to hit, even if he surely would be beaten by a man like that. But he's not scared. He's too reckless to feel fear. He knows that he will eventually get beaten by Neil just to have left home without saying anything, so this night escape better be profitable.

He had heard that club was one of the best for punk and metal gigs in San Diego, so that night he had finally decided to try to sneak in, even if he knew that it wouldn't have been easy. He's a minor. He has just made sixteen years.

He continues to stay still, staring at the bouncer with raging determination, while a few people enter and exit the club.
"You heard me or what, brat?! Get. The. Fuck. Lost."
"No!"

The man bolts and grabs Billy's forearm in a painful grip. Billy grimaces and tries to shove off the guy, but he's obviously bigger and stronger than him. "Let me go, you asshole!" he yells, feeling the rage boiling in his chest and making his sight go red. Before he can do something really stupid, like, trying to actually hit the big guy, a soft, calm voice collects their attention.

"My, my… what are you doing here, Jim? Beating up a kid?"

Billy and who must be Jim turns towards the source, finding a guy leaning loosely to the brick wall next to the entrance.

Billy blinks, shocked, and stares at the guy wide-eyed. He feels… strange. He can't even explain what he feels at the sight of that dude. He's actually, fucking… cool? He has brown, long smooth hair, a shirt of a band with cut sleeves, wrecked, baggy jeans, combat boots… and a skater hat with "suicidal" written on it. Yup. He's definitely cool for Billy's eyes. Maybe that's why he's looking at him, suddenly speechless, like a damn idiot.

"Nathan!" Jim calls him, surprised by his apparition. Then, he finally leaves the grip on Billy's arm, now suddenly looking embarrassed. "This kid must have fifteen years old! He wants to go in."

Nathan grins, a predatory sharp smile, and reaches them. He scrutinizes Billy from up to bottom, while he feels melting under that gaze. He has green eyes, bright green eyes, shark-like. Billy internally shakes his head. Why the fuck is he noticing all those kinds of stuff? That's weird.

"I like him." Nathan declares, after too many seconds passed just in studying Billy's features. Jim starts, surprised. "What?!" "Yup. There's some fire in him. I can see that through his eyes. I definitely like this kid!" Nathan chuckles, while Billy feels a sudden sensation of heat in his cheeks that makes him squirm in his spot, uncomfortable. Who the fuck is this guy?! He's very confident, he seems something almost like a big shot there, even if he doesn't look much older than Billy.

"I'm not a kid." Billy mumbles, trying to sound sure of himself. Nathan laughs again and pats his shoulder, making him almost flinch. "See that, Jim?! He's got a temper. That's cute. We'll let him in." Jim bolts, shocked. "What the fuck?! Are you nuts, Nathan?! What if the pigs do a raid and find him?! We can't afford to start to let minors go to our parties!"
Nathan doesn't look touched at all. He just shrugs and pats Billy's shoulder again. "He looks clever enough to fucking run if he sees the cops. Am I right, kiddo?"

Billy glares at him, slightly flushed. He doesn't know how to react to this guy. He feels the usual rage at his way too cocky and

unrespectful manners, but from the other side, Billy can't avoid feeling a strange… fascination? Something that tells him not to act like a prick for once in his life. He's almost grateful that a cooler dude like Nathan has laid down his eyes on him.

Nathan laughs again and throws an arm to Billy's shoulder. "Let's get inside. Shall we?" he gives a last glance to Jim, then he guides him into the building, walking through a large crowd of people. Billy can't fucking believe it. He did it! He's finally going to a metal concert! His heart is beating fast while Nathan's arm is still on his shoulder.

"Tonight is your lucky night, kiddo." he declares, grinning. Billy scoffs. "Stops that. You don't seem much older than me. My name is Billy." "Billy." Nathan repeats, languidly. He stops walking and just watches Billy for a while. "Well, nice to meet you, Billy. I'm Nathan. Welcome to the jungle, baby boy."

"Nathan adopted you tonight."
There's a nameless chick that is talking to Billy for a while, but he can't literally detach his sight from the older boy, now a few meters from them, busy flirting with a hot girl in leather skirt.

He takes a sip from his beer, not giving her any attention. Nathan is chuckling and leaning forward to the girl, who's laughing back, tilting her head back. Damn. The guy is a total asshole. It looks like everyone venerates him, wherever he goes he finds people that greet him, compliments him for something. Billy has learned that the guy is in some sort of collective with other people, and they organize gigs and parties with bands. It's fucking… awesome. He is, fucking awesome. He's exactly who Billy want to be.

Now Nathan has his tongue down the girl's throat, filthy, scandalous… hot as hell. Billy finds his eyes glued to the older boy, while a strange, itching sensation strikes him to his belly. The nameless chick next to him turns to Nathan and laughs. "Look at our heartbreaker!" she chirps, amused. Then, she talks again to Billy. "Her name is Vanessa. They're dating for a while."

Billy stores distantly the information. He doesn't give a flying fuck

about Vanessa. He’s too busy finding his eyes impossibly pointed to the boy in the act of making out with someone, while his cock is reacting in a very, strange, not appropriate way. The girl next to him speaks again in his ears. "Are you jealous, Billy?! You wanna go too?" Billy finally snaps from his reverie and looks at her, flushed. Without adding a word, he rushes to her lips, sliding his tongue rudely into her mouth. He was getting hard. Looking at a damn guy. That is something that he needs to correct, somehow.

The girl slips her fingers through his short, ruffled blonde curls, and moan into his mouth. Billy deepens the kiss, sliding his hands to her back until he can squeeze her ass. Then, he can’t help it. While he’s still kissing the hell out of this girl, he opens his eyes to check on Nathan. He’s still there, doing pretty much the same thing with that chick Vanessa. But… his eyes are open too. Open, and pointed straight to Billy.

Billy feels immediately his cock turning to rock at the sight. Nathan is staring at him, smirking between the kisses, and Billy knows how this is totally fucked up, but can’t avoid continuing to watch those piercing green eyes. This… is making him so damn hard. Impossibly hard.

After a while, the girl parts. Billy looks at her because seriously, he can’t avoid getting caught in what he was doing. He has spent the last three minutes kissing her while staring at a dude, that’s pretty much difficult enough to realize.

"You’re a good kisser!" she declares, licking her lips, maliciously. Billy tries to put up a flirty mode, while he’s internally freaking out for what has just happened. "Am I?" she pokes his chest, playfully. "Oh, yes! I think we’ll become friends, you and me." tsks. Like Billy even know her name. He’s distracted by the sudden arrival of Nathan with Vanessa under his arm.

"Come on, guys. They’re about to start." he points out to the small stage, where people are starting to gathering around. They reach the first line, shoving away the crowd of people. Once arrived, Nathan moves his arm from Vanessa’s shoulders to Billy’s. He speaks in his ear; Billy feels goosebumps at the sensation of his alcoholic breath into his neck.

"You know them?" "Who?" Nathan laughs. "The band, kiddo." Billy blushes slightly. That guy makes him so, fucking, nervous. "Nope." he admits, defeated. No reason to lie to Nathan, he looks like he could find out easily. "I just know that there should have been a metal concert, here, tonight." Nathan laughs again, tilting his head back, almost losing his stupid skater-hat.

"You’re adorable, seriously."
"Screw you."

Nathan doesn’t react to the insult, instead, he just pulls back the arm, chuckling, leaving Billy already craving the contact.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hullo :)

I don't love this chapter, but I wanted to introduce few dynamics that will be important for their personal growth. I also wanted to introduce the character of Nathan "the rebel cool guy", someone who Billy took as a model in a moment of his life where he didn't have the support of anyone else. I would love to write more about Billy sixteen, angry, lost and confused ahaha

Thank you for the kudos, I always feel kind of ashamed about my writing, as a non native english speaker I feel like I have the vocabulary of an eight-years-old kid and the grammar is probably all messed up and weird idk

Anyway, feel free to share your feelings if you want :)

13. The way I walk

Summary for the Chapter:

Evil plans & prep-talks

The hunting has been productive. They basically didn't do anything, 'cause Nancy had killed three demodogs with a freaky gun, all by herself. Damn, the priss sure knows how to shoot.

After burning the carcasses in a pile, they walk back to their cars, tired by the long day. Steve stands next to the Beemer, squirming in his spot, hesitant.

"We're going to drink a few cold ones at my place. Care to join us?" he asks then, a little too doubtful, to Nancy and Jonathan. Billy incinerates him with a nasty glare: damn no! But Nancy, luckily, shakes her head.

"Thank you, Steve… maybe another time." she moves her eyes to Billy, as if she's trying to say something like 'I'm not appreciated, anyway', and he really wants to groan in annoyance. Steve looks uncomfortably through them, then, he makes a small, nervous smile. "Ok. Thank you, anyway, for today…"

There's a small exchange of greetings, then, unexpectedly, Robin rushes to the Camaro's passenger door. What the fuck? "Did you hit your head, sweetheart? The car of your friend is the other one." Billy spats. She smirks in response. "You right about Steve, he drives like a granny. Besides, I want to try this car, for the sake of science." these words have the power to pump up Billy's ego. "Sure, sweetheart." he climbs to the driver seat, yelling at Steve that they would have met directly at his place.

Of course, Robin's real purposes weren't to try the Camaro's speed. She lowers the window and put out a hand, feeling the fresh breeze of the evening. She looks ready to do a speech. At least, she's not bitching about the music like the other cows of that shithole town.

Billy glances at her, tightening the grip on the steering wheel.

"So? What do you want, Buckley?"
She sighs. "Stop being a bitch to Nancy." "Excuse me, what?!" "You heard me, Hargrove. Stop. Being. A. bitch. To. Nancy."

Billy scoffs and pats the steering wheel, full of nervous energy at that reproach. He fucking hates when people tell him what to do. "Why? She's a stuck-up bitch. It's not my fault, I can't stand her." what the fuck does Robin want now? Why is she defending the priss? Are they even friends? That would be a shame, Billy is actually starting to like the girl.

"I don't like her too." Robin states. "So why are you defending her?" "I'm not." Robin glares at him, clenching the roof of the car, hair messy from the wind. "But Steve… is upset because they have argued this morning and… guess what? Ding, ding, ding. It was about you, Hargrove."
Billy widens his eyes in surprise. That's odd. Why should they argue about him? Nonsense.
"What? Why?"
"I don't know the details… but this is something important to Steve. He still cares about her, about their friendship, and you're making it impossible by being a child."
Billy scoffs and spats 'Fuck you. I'm not a child.', proving her point and causing the biggest eye-rolls in Robin. "Hargrove, I'm trying to help you here. I know you hate her, believe me, I do, but could you just try to be… less of an asshole?" "Hell, no." "Do it for Steve."

Billy blinks and watches her with the corner of the eye. "What do you know… about… Steve?" Robin shrugs. "Pretty much everything. You know, he's extremely loud. I helped him realize that he was starting to like a boy."

He can't avoid the small red tint on his cheeks. But Robin… she's gay too. It should be ok if she knows. He must trust her, me has to hope she's not a big mouth.
However, he decides to go for a threat, because that's his style and he can't help it. He turns his head to face her with the most venomous expression of his repertory. "This is serious shit, Buckley… If you say a word…" "Reelax! Would you? I told you, I'm gay. And that's a secret too, by the way, so, we are pretty much even." Billy glares at her for a few more seconds, then, he sighs and faces back the road.

"But I guess you don't have a dad that could literally kill you by beating the the shit out of you, if he knew about the wrong information…"
Robin gives him a sympathetic look. "I guess not." she admits. "Steve told me about it." "Geez!" Billy punches the steering wheel, angrily. "Can Steve not tell my private shit around for a second?!" "Billy…" she leans forward, looking at him intensively, making him feel uncomfortable under the heaviness of that gaze. "What happens to you is sick, and so unfair. A lot of people like us get that treatment from their parents… but it's not our fault. We're not doing anything wrong, you should never think that."

Billy swallows, speechless. He can feel the heavy grip on his throat. Talking about that kind of stuff… it's something that he had never done with anybody, and he hardly knows Robin at all. But she's speaking using the 'we' pronoun, and that makes it kind of… less hard?

"Tsk. My old man would hate me even If I weren't a fag, Buckley. It's always been like this. In fact, now he even believes that I'm somehow cured and I got a girlfriend. He even told me to take her over to dinner… should I dress up Steve with a skirt?"

Robin laughs. "Or maybe… I could help you. I could be your girlfriend." Billy blinks in response, can't help to be actually really surprised by the proposal. "You? My girlfriend?" she shrugs. "Why not? Parents love me. I can be really sweet." that would be… that would be perfect, but Billy can't avoid the suspicion. "Why would you do that?"
Robin thinks about the answer for some seconds, then, she just shrugs, looking absent-mindedly at the empty road in front of them. "No reason. I guess we should just stick together and try to help each other, since we're on the same boat." "Us queers?" there is a pause of silence.

"Yes, Billy. Us queers."

"Pretty boy, I want to jump into your fancy pool. Would you mind lend me the swimming trunks?"
"Why don't you just do it in your underwear?"

"Because I ain't got one, princess."

Steve groans. "Gross!" Billy shrugs in response. "Hey, if it was up to me, I would swim naked, but I'm trying to be polite with the lady here." he points out to Robin who dramatically rolls her eyes. "As If I give a shit about your cock, Hargrove."

Steve gets the swimming trunks for Billy and a six-pack that throws at Robin. They eventually end up drinking on the deckchairs while Billy jumps in the pool and splash around like a goddamn mermaid.

"You know, Stevie… from next week you will have to work by yourself often, since I'm starting school for my last year." Robin says casually. Billy interjects her, talking a few meters away, grabbing the edge of the pool, his hair wet and messy. "No shit! Are you a senior too?" he asks, excited by the news. "Yep. We were in few classes together the previous year, Sherlock." Billy laughs, tilting back his head, his dripping curls plastered on his forehead. He looks so pure and happy to Steve's eyes.

"I guess I didn't notice you, Buckley."
"I guess you were too busy noticing Steve, Hargrove."
Billy mumbles something in his teeth and looks away, suddenly grumpy. Steve laughs openly.

"How will I survive without you at work, Rob?" he complains then, sighing. "Keith's an asshole." "He's just getting an act of small revenge for the years you spent being the school grade A dickhead." Robin states, vaguely annoyed. Billy talks from the edge of the pool. "Steve's right. The guy is an asshole, we should cut off the wheels of his car and teach him a lesson." Robin rolls her eyes. "That's not how a mature person behave, Hargrove." Billy mocks back. "Well, maybe, being a *mature person* is for pussies, Buckley." she groans. "God, your brain is so small, like a nut." she points at him and then Steve. "Dingus and Neanderthal, you guys make the perfect couple."
"Come here, say it to my face, sweetheart."

Steve smiles, looking at the two most important persons of his life arguing childishly. Suddenly, he feels a wave of joy in his chest. He has spent so many months feeling and being completely alone, tormented by nightmares in that big, empty house. But now… he has

Robin, the best friend that he could ever ask, and Billy… arrogantly stormed into his life, out of nowhere. He's so, so so lucky.

"You what?!" Steve exclaims, shocked. Robin rolls her eyes, as usual. "Come ooon, dingus! It's for your own sake. We have to solve the problem about his asshole father once for all." he sighs in response, running a hand through his hair. He's not jealous that Robin is going to introduce herself as Billy's girlfriend in his house… that would be stupid. But still… what if something goes wrong? What if Billy's dad finds out that it's all made up?

"I guess you're right." he sighs, after a while. If this could help make Billy safer in his own house… he's more than ok with that. He's still pretty surprised by the sudden sort-of-friendship that Billy and Robin have developed. The night before they have seemed pretty close, even if they were always to each other's throats, but not in a bad way. If only Billy could be a decent human being with Nancy too…

The door opens, a cute, little girl with red hair and freckles enters, smiling all cheerful at them, or better, at Robin. Steve smirks at the sight. Here comes Robin's new crush.
"Hey guys… I got the movies back for you." she chirps, sliding the VHS on the counter. "There's not your thug with you today?" Steve jokes, mean, gaining a glare from her friend. Elizabeth flushes slightly and starts ruffling a red lock, uncomfortable. "I know, Chris has been kind of a douche with you guys… I don't know why he did that. It's not like that, usually…"

Steve scoffs. "Yeah, I guess he's full of hidden qualities that we don't know." Robin elbows him in the ribcage. "Steve, drop it! Besides, you shouldn't be the one to judge, looking at your recent frequentation of assholes." ouch. That hurts. He guesses she's kind of right, Billy is, without any trace of doubt, the biggest asshole in town. Is he worse than Chris?! Nah, impossible. Well, at least, Billy is hot.

Elizabeth gives Robin a questioning look, but she just smiles casually with a small shrug in response. The girls end up speaking about movies, again, walking around the store, totally matched in their conversation. Jeez. Why is Elizabeth with a jerk like him?! He treats her like shit, she's way too good for him.

After something like half an hour, Billy appears in the shop from nothing, releasing his vibrant energy in the air like usual. Today he's wearing a large, flower pattern black shirt, unbuttoned to the navel, tight jeans and black converse. He looks somehow younger when he wears them. Even cuter than usual. Steve looks at him dreamily, an idiotic smile plastered on his face, while he stalks to the counter, with his trademark smirk on his face.

"Good morning, princess." he chirps, languidly. Jeez. Steve really, really wants to kiss the hell out of him, right now. It has been more than 24 hours since the last time they have kissed properly, not to mention the last time they have gone beyond the kiss. At least two days, and that feels like an eternity.
"Morning to you. Were you missing me?" he teases. Billy shrugs casually. "I don't have to work today, school is still off. I got nothing to do. I was getting bored, I can't stay home for more than a few hours." "What about Max?" "Mh? What about her?" "How is she?" "She's better than me, pretty boy. I'm always covering her ass with her Lucas thing." Steve gasps in shock. "Really?! Looks like you become a good brother, after all…" "Tsks. If Neil finds out, my ass is grass, Harrington."

Steve grins and leans forward to the counter, getting closer to the boy. "Aww, that would be a shame, wouldn't it? Such a fine ass." Billy giggles and reduces the space between them to barely a few inches, happily accepting the challenge that Steve has started. He talks with his most, lascivious, low, tone. "I guess it would be, since you're so keen to play with this, fine, ass."

Steve jumps back, suddenly feeling a strong heat in his cheeks. Holy fucking shit! Billy has practically said that he would… let him do things… let him… *fuck him*? The thought literally crashes his brain, reducing it at a couple of absent neurons, while all the blood flows together in one, precise, point.

Billy laughs at the sight, satisfied, while Steve gasps like a fish, shocked. That asshole!

Robin clears her voice, arriving with Elizabeth from their tour though the shelves and interrupting the way too embarrassing scene. Steve snaps at her, his face still a flushed mess. "Dingus? You ok there? You

look on the verge to pass out." Steve nods vigorously. "I'm ok, Robin. Just Hargrove messing with my head." "So, nothing new." she flatly comments.
Billy looks at Elizabeth with a raised eyebrow. "Do I know you, sweet cheeks?" she squirms awkwardly on her spot at the pet name. "Yes, Billy… I'm Elizabeth. Elizabeth Miller." he shakes his head and makes a small shrug, while Steve facepalms. God, he's such a rude asshole! He has the attention span of a golden fish.

"I'm Chris's girlfriend. Chris Robinson." she adds, then, a note of impatience in her voice. Finally, looks like Billy has recognized her. "Ah… Robinson. Jesus, I hate that dude." "I know, right!" Steve agrees, gesturing satisfied towards Billy.

Robin sighs to Elizabeth. "Ignore them." the red-head chuckles, apparently not particularly upset by the common hate that guys seems to have towards her boyfriend. "Actually… didn't know you two were friends. Billy, didn't you… have a fight with Steve last year?" well. That's kind of common knowledge.

Steve and Billy look at themselves for a moment, then, they both burst into a laugh. "Yeah… yeah he basically kicked my ass." Steve explains, drily, still giggling, as if it's the most normal thing to say in the world. "Now we're best buddies." Billy jokes, throwing an arm to Steve's shoulder. Elizabeth blinks, surprised. "Oh. Well, that's great." she starts to ruffling a strand again, and Steve thinks it's actually cute how this girl shows up when she's about to say something that makes her uncomfortable.

"Actually… we're going to do a bonfire at the quarry on Saturday. It's the usual pre-school party. Everybody will be there. Do you want to…" "We'll be there." Billy interrupts her, confident. Steve snaps at him, annoyed. "Excuse me? We?" "We." Billy pats Steve's chest, putting too much strength and making him cough for air. "You need to get out of your shell, Harrington. Live a little. And the same…" he points an inquisitive finger to Robin, resolute. "…it's for you, Buckley. So we're going to that lame party and get the hell thrashed."

Steve sighs and looks to Robin. "Looks like we don't have much choice, Rob." "No shit, dingus."

"I hate the last week of the summer holidays. Makes me so depressed." Dustin exhales, dramatically, while slurping loudly his chocolate milkshake.
"I believed you liked school, Henderson." Steve objects, absently, putting a few fried chips in his mouth. "What makes you believe that?" Steve shrugs. "Don't know, since you're a science nerd or something…"
Dustin glares at him. "First of all, you don't need school to expand your knowledge, as my summer camp can prove. Second… it's not about the classes. It's about the people. School is full of assholes."

Steve sighs, looking pensively around him. "I guess you're right about that." school is definitely the worst time of life, where you're launched violently in a micro-society reigned by douchebags. He's actually pretty glad to have finished it, even if he's now busy in a shitty, underpaid job while he tries to kill some time looking for what to do with his goddamn life.

"We're going to do a big campaign on Saturday. Care to join us?" Dustin asks, then, casually. Steve sighs and stretches his legs in the seat. Why are the diner's seats always so small?
"You know that I'm not good at your nerd game." he declares, after a while. "Besides, I'm busy on Saturday." at this big statement, Dustin lifts his eyebrows in surprise mixed with skepticism. "Seriously?" Steve scoffs. "Yeah, seriously, Henderson. I'm going to a party." "A party." the kid repeats, perplexed. Jeez, is it so impossible to believe?!
"With Billy?" he asks then, now looking really suspicious about that news. Steve rolls his eyes. "Yeah, Dustin. I'm going with Billy. And Robin." "Are you back being an asshole? Are you… King Steve again?"

Steve blinks. That's a stupid question, but Dustin seems really concerned about that.
"I'm not 'King Steve' again, dude! I'm just trying to… be a teenager? I don't know. Besides, I think that Billy could physically drag us to the party if we don't agree to be there." Dustin slams a hand to the table, making Steve flinch in response. "I knew it! He's forcing you guys! Is he using his Mind-Flayer power on you?! Because we don't see you anymore, dude! We miss you." his voice becomes more and more

filled with drama, until he's practically whining.

Steve gulps, now suddenly feeling guilty at that implication. "I'm sorry I'm not very present these days… I've been busy, you know" Dustin scoffs. "Yeah, with Billy." "Dude… you sound like a jealous girlfriend, you know that?"
Dustin squirms in his seat. "It's just that… you become, very, very involved when you like someone. Steve."

Wait. What?

Steve gasps like a fish, speechless. "I don't… I…" he stutters, panicking. Dustin sighs. "Dude. It's ok. I'm ok with that, we're in the eighties. I'm not upset because you like a guy… I'm just upset because you're avoiding us all of a sudden."

Maybe Dustin is right. He has been distant in the recent weeks. The thing with Billy… had happened so fast, it had literally overwhelmed him, leaving no space left for any other thoughts. But even with Nancy, it was pretty much the same at the beginning. When something so strong, so intense, strikes your life from nothing, it goes on top on everything else.
Maybe Dustin can't understand that yet. He just needs to be a little patient, waiting for things to set up. With Nancy, too, he had started to ignore his other friends, too focused on their relationship.

Jeez. He's comparing Nancy and Billy again in his mind. They're the complete opposite. The thing with Billy is so different… it's like, Steve gets hard just at the thought of the guy in his mind, but they're also, kind of… friends? Companions? Partners in crime?

…Is that strange? Sure it sounds a little messed up in his mind.

Dustin snaps a finger in his face, collecting his attention. "Steve! Are you there, buddy?!" Steve gasps awkwardly. "Sorry, yeah. I was thinking. So… you're ok with it? For real?"
The kid sighs and rolls his eyes dramatically. "Yep. I'm not *reactionary*, Steven." "Reactionary?" Steve repeats, dumbly. The kid sure knows a lot of fancy words. "Besides…" Dustin continues, now all serious. "Will is gay too. He told us."

Steve makes a surprised sound, his mouth in a ridiculous 'o' shape. "Will… what?!" Dustin shrugs, looking not concerned at all. "He likes boys. He told us yesterday. Between you and me, I already knew that. Mike too has understood it before. Lucas was a little weirded out, but he'll get through it. Max looked genuinely happy, and El… I don't believe El has neither the concept of sexual orientation at all, so…"

Wow. That's a lot of information to process. Steve parts his hair and exhales a long breath. "Fuuuck… it's like, I completely ignored the existence of gay people before. I mean, I don't know, besides famous stars on TV or something. And now…. they're everywhere! They sprout out like… mushrooms!"

Dustin pinches the bridge of his nose. "Steve, it's not that gay people are appearing from nothing like wild animals. They have always been there! Look at the ancient Greeks!" "Ancient Greeks?" Steve repeats, dumbly. "You mean like Caesar, or…?" Dustin rolls his eyes. "That was one of the greatest Roman emperors. Anyway, the only difference is that now, they're coming out of the closet. And you…" he points a finger to Steve's face, resolute. "…you're one of them, buddy."

Steve stares at him, shocked by the unexpected prep-talk. The kid is wise. How is he always wiser than him?! He's just a thirteen-year-old brat, for god's sake.

"I still like tits." he spats after a while, absently drinking from his strawberry milkshake. Dustin makes a small shrug and lifts his cup for a toast.
"Amen to that!"

Notes for the Chapter:

No one: ...
Steve: I still like tits

Yay! I love writing about them doing normal teenage stuff < 3
Also, it's slowly becoming more and more full of

rainbows, yeee

14. White rabbit

Summary for the Chapter:

Doors of perception & masculine outburst

Notes for the Chapter:

Partying with Billy? Must be wild :)

WARNING: Magic mushrooms!

I also highly recommend you listen to the song "White rabbit" by Jefferson Airplane.
That's it, this chapter was really fun to write.

"Why am I even in the backseats again?!" Steve complains, grumpy. Robin turns her head to look at him, a sly grin on her face. "I told you, dingus. I suffer from car sickness, I need to feel the air on my skin." Steve scoffs. "You shouldn't be in Billy's car if you suffer from car sickness, like, at all." Billy speaks aloud above the high volume of the music that is blasting from the speakers. "Stop whining like a bitch, Harrington. My car, my rules."

"Fine!" Steve groans, annoyed.

Billy starts to drive with a loud screech of the tires, making Steve wonder if he's going to die tonight by his hand. He gulps, looking absently at the seats.
"Last time I've been in this spot I was beaten to death, with Max that was driving your car…" he reflects, but clearly he hasn't thought about the possible consequences of a big statement like that, because Billy immediately bolts on his seat and turns to him, his face a mask of pure, barely contained, anger.

"SHE WHAT?!"

Shit, shit, shit. Steve giggles nervously, trying to lighten up the atmosphere a bit. "It's an old story…" "I'm gonna kill that little bitch!" Robin grabs nervously Billy's shoulder, noticing how the boy isn't paying any attention to the drive. "Hargrove, would you watch the

road?! For god's sake!" Billy grunts but does what he has been told, his first tightens to the steering wheel.

Steve doesn't want to admit it to himself, but he is a little nervous. He hasn't been to a party in months and going to one with Billy and Robin is way too weird. The idea of facing again Tommy H and that bunch of pricks makes his hands itch. That one isn't his crowd anymore, even if he isn't sure what his crowd is supposed to be, now, considering his recent frequentation of kids.

He can't show how tense he really is. Billy is going to mock him, call him chicken or something.

"What time is it? Aren't we, like, super late…?" Robin absently asks, looking at her watch. Billy shrugs casually, slamming to the steering wheel timing with the music. "Make them wait. They have to desire you." she rolls her eyes at this idiotic sentence. "You're such a walking cliché, Hargrove."

They eventually arrive at the quarry, a row of cars is already parked, while loud hollering and music can be heard from distance. Now Steve's hands are starting to sweat uncontrollably, Robin notices it while they walk towards the bonfire. She squeezes gently his shoulder. "Relax, dingus. It's just a party, not a big deal." yup. Easy to say. All the worst shit had happened in parties, in the recent developments of his life.

Steve chuckles, trying to hide the discomfort as best as he can. "I know, I know. I'm ok, seriously." she gives him a questioning glare, then, an annoying voice intercepts them.
"Hargrove, my boy!"

Here he is. That's definitely Tommy H that is greeting Billy in a quick, way-too-virile, half-hug. Of course he has to be the first person they happen to cross. Because Steve isn't enough nervous on his own.

"What's up, Tommy? Haven't seen you in a while." Billy responds, flat-tone. Tommy shrugs in false modesty. "Well, you know, got to set everything for college… prepare for the big new start." then, he finally notices Steve and Robin standing behind Billy, and an ugly sneer spreads on his freckled face. "Harrington?! What the hell are

you doing here?!"
Steve sighs. Yeah. What is he doing here?! He's starting to ask himself the same question.

"Ehy, Tommy." he spats, almost disgusted. Tommy looks at Billy, then at Steve, then at Billy again, trying to process that information. "Are you two here together?!" he exclaims, like that's the most surprising news in the world, and well. Perhaps it is.

Billy shrugs, glaring at the boy from up to button, now switching in his alpha mode. "Yep. Is there a problem with that?" Tommy flinches and laughs nervously, Steve finds himself thinking how the jittery reaction of the douchebag is actually quite amusing. Tommy is a coward, an ass-licker, and he hasn't the balls to face Billy. He's a follower, not a leader.
"Why… why are you hanging out with them? They're losers." he tries, gesturing at them. Billy doesn't move a muscle, he stays right there, his feet planted in front of the freckled asshole, but he looks ready to burst in any moment. Steve can perceive the calm before the storm.

"Pretty sure that's none of your fucking business. I don't need your approval, Hagan. Now, move. You're on my way."
Tommy gasps like a fish, shocked and hurt. Steve wants to laugh, but he tries to keep it back for himself. No need to add more fuel to the fire.

"But, but…"
"I said MOVE."

And that's the last warning, a sane person must listen to it, when it comes from Billy Hargrove. Tommy makes a step aside, with a scared look on his face and the tail between his legs like a puppy dog.

They surpass him and stalk to the bonfire. Steve must suppress the urge to slide his tongue into Billy's mouth, or maybe just get on his knees and suck the hell out of him, showing the guy his pure, raging admiration.

"Man… that was cool!" Steve comments, chuckling and grabbing Billy's bicep. Yup, having Billy has a tormentor is pretty much shite, but, him as an ally… a whole different story.

"I know, Harrington. That's because I am, cool." Billy boasts, causing a roll of eyes in Robin.

Steve laughs, now feeling genuinely lightened up and more inclined to party.
"You're humble too."

They end up losing Billy after two minutes. He's been dragged away by other stupid jocks and popular kids, all greeting him like he's a damn Rockstar. It's not that they could expect something else, isn't it?

Steve is ok to be in the shadow. Actually, he is more than ok. He and Robin can't avoid awkward conversations with people they don't like for a while, then, when they see an empty spot near the big bonfire, they rush to conquer it. They're safer there, they can spend the rest of the night being in their comfortable lair and pretty much isolate themselves, avoiding the social obligations typical of parties.

After something, like, one hour, Billy spots them and rudely sits in between, making them forcibly shove aside.

"Here you are!" he chirps, and Steve can tell he already smells like alcohol and sweat, his red shirt is now completely unbuttoned, exposing the defined abs, his hair is less combed and he looks giddy and buzzed. "Having fun?" he asks, taking a sip from his beer.

Steve responds with a small shrug, unable to avoid the truth. "Yeah… kind of…" it's so evident that they're totally uneasy. Billy scrutinizes him with a pensive frown, nodding slightly like he has figured out the problem behind it. Then, he reaches something in his right pocket, troubling in the in achieving of it due to his too tight jeans, as usual.
Steve thinks that he's about to make a joint, but when Billy passes something into his and Robin's hand, he instantly recognizes that, not, it's definitely not weed. He watches at the strange, brown thing, eyes wide.

"The fuck is that?" he asks, confused. "Eat them." Billy orders, firmly. "What? No? Why would I do that?" "Maybe you should at least tell us

what that is supposed to be, Hargrove." Robin interjects, snarky as usual. Billy makes a scene, sighing and rolling his eyes as if he's dealing with two annoying kids who are attempting his patience.

"Mushrooms."
"Mushrooms?!" Steve and Robin exclaim in unison. Billy shrugs and takes another sip from his beer. "Yep. There's a guy there who is selling them. It's not as good as a real trip of acid, but still, they're quite funny. Eat them."

Steve looks uncertain at the dried mushroom in his hands, while Robin is starting to nibble one. What the fuck?! She hasn't even spent a minute thinking about it, considering the gravity of her actions. The mushrooms, they could be poisonous. What if she ends up in the hospital? What if she ends up in the psych ward?!

"They're not that bad." she comments, completely calm, compared to the train of thoughts that Steve is having at the moment. "Robin! What the fuck are you doing?!" Steve scolds her, shocked. She shrugs casually. "This party is lame. I've always wanted to try them. Besides, it can't be worse than that time where evil Russians gave us LSD, Stevie."
Well… she could be right about that. They have already faced the worst, but still… it's not safe to use drugs bought from a stranger, goddamit! Everybody knows that.
"What the fuck?! Evil Russians have given you an acid?!" Billy repeats, while he's chewing a dried mushroom too, like it's a fucking chip.

Steve stares back at the mushrooms and sighs. Billy and Robin are going to be stoned soon, and he really, really doesn't want to be the only sober there. Ok. Fuck it. Robin is right, it can't be as bad as his one and only trip on LSD. He's been through worse. Besides, it's not chemical, isn't it?

He tentatively reaches a mushroom to his mouth and takes a small bite. Eww. They're disgusting. How can Robin find them edible?!

At this sight, Billy pats vigorously his shoulder, satisfied by Steve's final decision.
"That's how I like you, pretty boy! Take out the rebel in ya!"

"That’s a stupid idea." Steve mumbles, surrendered.
"Probably." Robin agrees.

After some time just passed in eating the mushrooms, Billy breaks the silence.
"Tell me about those evil Russians that had drugged you guys. Are they still here? I’m interested."

"Guys, how do you know when they start to kick?" Steve’s nervous question is completely ignored. Robin and Billy have spent the last ten minutes arguing about how humankind has invented the fire. Standing for Billy’s theory, they have started to use the fire that has been casually started by thunderstorms, while Robin is trying to argue that there must be someone that had casually tried to use rocks and sticks and have found out how to create fire from nothing.

"That guy sure looked like an idiot." Billy comments, staring back pensively to the fire in front of him.
"Yeah, maybe…" Robin agrees, hugging herself and never stopping to staring into the crackling flames. "But someone needs to try something first. Like, berries. Have you ever wonder how come we know which one is edible and which not? How many people died in the attempt to discover what to eat and what to avoid?" "Shit… Buckley. I think you’re making a point here." Billy agrees, gravely, as if they’re talking about the sense of life and the existence of God itself.

Steve’s mind is too fuzzy to follow their raving conversation. He moves his eyes on Billy, noticing all of a sudden how bright his hair looks. It’s like, his curls are glowing or something. Looks like he has said it aloud, because Billy is suddenly laughing, his teeth surprisingly white and pearl-like.

"He’s right! He’s right!" Robin exclaims, squirming on her spot. "Your hair is glowing, Hargrove. It's brilliant." she reaches a hand to Billy’s hair, making him retreats with a start. "Hey! No touching, Buckley!"

Suddenly both Robin and Steve are trying to touch Billy’s hair, under his complaints. They really must look like three impossible idiots on the outside… but who fucking cares. Billy’s hair is glowing! That’s

way more important than any other preoccupation!

"Seriously, it looks like a twig… is it even real?!" Robin questions, her voice dreamy. "It's real, sweetheart. Stop harassing me." "Harassing?! Precious from you, Hargrove."
Steve looks away to the people in distance, the trees, the lights made by the fire. Everything… everything is moving, rhythmically, like it's coordinated in a sinuous dance. In and out. Slowly but steady… connected, intersected. Yeah. That makes total sense.

Looks like he has just said his thought aloud another time, because Billy and Robin are staring at him again, wide-eyed. Shit. Their eyes are really wide, big and luminescent. Since when are they that big?!

"Guys…" Steve hisses, uncertain, squirming on his spot, moving his sight around in a paranoic way. "Guys… I think I'm high…"

Billy and Robin just blink for a moment, motionless. Then, they look at each other and burst into an amused, massive laugh. "No shit, dingus!" Robin exclaims, almost yelling, grabbing Billy's shoulder and gasping for air through the laughter. Steve, for a strange empathetic reflex, starts to laugh too, without any apparent reason.

They continue like this for a while, saying the dumbest things and laughing as if they're the funniest jokes in the world. Surely, they all three look like idiots but they're too high to care. There's no space for concerns or regrets, after all, they're in this together, on the same, colorful and psychedelic boat.

There's a moment where Tommy appears again, causing an internal movement of aversion in Steve's guts. It's like every little emotion is amplified at the maximum.
"Hargrove, my boy, do you want to try the Keg Record again?" Tommy asks, and, jeez, he has just been treated like shit by Billy, why is he insisting on being his friend again? That guy is so utterly pathetic.

Robin points at him, giggling aloud. "Guys! His face! Doesn't he look like a wax doll?!" Steve follows Robin's arm with his eyes, moving his sight until he meets Tommy's face. She's right! He looks like a wax doll! How did Steve not think about it before?!

"Damn… it's like his face is a mask..." Steve comments, staring at the boy, wide-eyed, causing a burst of laughter in Billy and Robin. "His freckles are giving me a headache." comments Billy, wiping the tears from his eyes with his hands.

Tommy is looking shocked at them, gasping like a fish. "What… what the fuck…" he mumbles, stunned, and god, if his face is not the best thing in the world! The satisfactions are increasing, tonight.

Billy tries to compose himself, gaining a certain look of seriousness, but there's still a mocking, amused expression on his face. He gestures towards the freckled boy. "No, no… I'm sorry." he talks with a wolfish grin plastered on his face. "Go on. You were saying?" and, at these words, Steve literally explodes, falling on the grass, his hands covering his mouth. Robin is laughing too in Billy's crook of the neck.

Tommy squirms awkwardly on his spot. He snarls, trying to sound venomous, but failing:"You guys are nuts." and then, he's walking away, leaving them sharing complicit glances through their chuckles.

"I'm pretty sure you're losing cool points here, Hargrove." Robin teases him, receiving a shrug in response. "I'm pretty sure I don't give a shit about that."

That's true. Billy has decided to spend his night with them, laughing and joking like an idiot. It's like he's not caring about the social rules of the school's primitive hierarchy, because he has now raised above it. It's some kind of upgrade, to be honest.

"Who's playing guitar?!" a guy appears from nothing, waving an acoustic guitar and yelling into Steve's ears. Robin jumps on her spot and raises a hand, suddenly overexcited by the question.
"Me! Me!" she grabs the instruments and starts to strum, probably checking if it's tuned properly, under the scrutinizing glare of Steve. "Are you sure? I mean… aren't you… too high for this?"
Robin continues her wise gestures and responds to Steve with a small shrug. "There's only a way to find out, dingus."

"You play guitar, Buckley? You're actually way cooler than I thought." Billy observes, with a playful smirk on his face. At these words, Robin grimaces. "Please, Hargrove. I'm in a band, actually."

Now, a small crowd has gathered around them, waiting for Robin to begin her show, but she doesn't seem bothered at all by the presence of other people intent on watching her.
After some preparation, she starts to play. It's a slow, hypnotic jingle, that sounds almost like a valzer. Billy is staring interested at her, his hands on his cheeks and his elbow pointed on his knees. He looks cute. He looks like a child that is waiting for his goodnight story.

Robin starts to sing. Her voice is… low, deep, sensual. Steve gasps for the surprise at the heard of it. It's soothing, warm. He doesn't know if it's due to his not too normal mental state, but he can actually feel the heat in his body caused by that marvelous sound.

"*One pill makes you larger, and one pill makes you small, and the one that mother gives you, don't do anything at all… Go ask Alice, when she's ten feet tall…*"

Boy and girls around them share some glances, nodding surprised at how good Robin is. Steve doesn't know the song, but it sounds kinda familiar. It must be something old-school, it gives him some hippy vibes.

"*And if you go chasing rabbits, and you know you're going to fall, tell 'em a hookah, smoking caterpillar, has given you the call… call Alice, when she was just small…*"

Other people arrive, called by the music. One of them is a small, red-head girl, who rushes towards Robin and starts to look at her with something that can be defined as simply adoration. Robin continues to sing, her voice is beautiful, so beautiful, that Steve feels literally overwhelmed by the warmness on his skin produced by the melodious vocal timbre of Robin. She raises her voice and starts to strum faster and harder.

"*When the men of chessboard, get up and tell you where you go, and you've just had some kind of mushroom, and your mind is moving low… go ask Alice! I think she'll know…*"

Her voice has become way more acute while she's playing more and more hastily, ravingly. Elizabeth gasps and puts a hand on her chest, while Billy is grinning madly at the scene, over-excited.

"*…When logic, and proportion, have fallen sloppy dead… and the White Knight is talking backwards, and the Red Queen is off with her head… REMEMBER, what the Dormhouse said… FEED YOUR HEAD… FEED YOUR HEAD!*"

Robin finishes with a last, strong, hit. She's panting, slightly flushed and with her hair in a mess. Everyone is speechless, and for ten seconds straight, they're all just gasping, still trying to process what they've just heard. It's almost cathartic, the sudden silence, feels almost like the afterglow of an orgasm.

Robin makes a small, embarrassed smile, clearing her voice awkwardly. Looks like she has realized just now that she's been under the spotlights for the recent two minutes. Then, finally, everyone burst into cheers and applauses, making Robin instantly facepalms shyly.

Billy grips his hair and shouts:"That was MAD! Buckley, damn girl, you're hot shit!" "Yeah, Robin! That was awesome, dude, seriously!" Steve agrees, speaking above the crowd. She slides her hands over her face and sighs. "Yeah, uhm, guys, this sudden popularity is making me nervous… so I guess I'm gonna go pee in the trees and hope that I'll be back being the geek weirdo girl at my return."

She jumps on her feet and clumsily tries to get through the people, in the poor attempt to escaping her five minutes of glory. "Seriously, Buckley! You should be in a band or something." Billy yells, making Steve's eyes roll in an uncontrolled reflex. "Dude, she has literally just said that she is in a band." Golden-fish attention span strikes back.

"I'll go with you!" Elizabeth springs to her. Robin can't help blinking in surprise at her sight. "Oh. Hey, Liz. Yeah, sure." they go away walking side by side, while Billy lights a cigarette and mumbles between his teeth:"Why do girls always go to the bathroom together…"

"That was… so good! More than good! That was amazing, actually." Liz chirps, trotting next to Robin, trying to keep her walk with her short legs. Robin giggles, moving a blonde lock behind her ear. "I don't know, I'm completely baked… I could have played like shit, I

wouldn't have noticed anyway." "But you didn't!" Liz talks back, outing too much volume in her voice.

Robin stops and finally turns to face her. She's so afraid that she could do something reckless, so she's trying not to look too much at the red-head. And, damn, tonight Liz is… cuter than ever. Her skin is translucent white, with a galaxy of small freckles where Robin could literally drown. She's smiling at her, spreading vibrant, chemical electricity.

"Did you take something?" she asks, but there's no reproach in her voice, just mere curiosity. Robin scoffs and moves her eyes away. "Yeah, well… Hargrove, Billy, gave us magic mushrooms."

Liz nods, pensive. "I see."

They resume their walk towards the dark trees, leaving the lights and the noises of the bonfire at their back. Robin's sight is pretty much still fucked up between shapes and colors, but she can do that. She can try to get back to normality a little bit. It takes some mental effort, but still.

"You guys seem very close." Liz observes, thoughtful, after a while. "Well… Steve is a dear friend of mine. We got closer when Evil Rus… I mean, when some bad stuff happened to us." Fuck. She's still too high for this conversation, she can't keep back her thoughts, she has no inhibitions at all. She's entering the danger zone… definitely.

"What about Billy?" Liz urges then. Robin shrugs. "Well, I guess he's a recent acquaintance. If you would have asked me a few weeks ago, I could have never, never imagined that he and I would get along. But, I guess… I found out that we have a lot of things in common."

"Oh." Liz rubs her chin. "Are you two… I mean… are you… dating him?" Robin freezes in her spot, shocked. She stares at her, with an outraged frown on her face. "Me? Hargrove? WHAT?! Eeew, no!" at these words, Liz smiles and Robin doesn't know if it's her altered perception or what, but she looks almost… relieved.

"Why so strange? He's one of the hottest boys in school. Everyone would be thrilled to have his attention and, believe me, he couldn't

detach his eyes from you, while you were playing…"

Is that… Holy shit, is that *jealousy*? Robin asks herself if she's being delusional.

She scoffs, annoyed. "Trust me, Liz, I'm really, really, not his type. And he's not mine."

Some silence follows, Robin can feel the eyes of the girl glued to her figure.

"Who's… who's your type?" and it's there. It's there, the teasing tone of Liz's voice. Nope, Robin is not delusional. She looks at the smaller girl, a raised eyebrow. She's smirking, waiting for her response.

"You sound oddly interested, Miller." Robin smirks back and crosses her arms. Liz squirms on her spot and it's so evident how she's trying to be confident and miserably failing.
"…Maybe I am."
"Mh. Why?"

Now Liz doesn't know what to say and gasps like a fish, taken by surprise. Robin is too softened by her amusing cute reaction, so she just laughs and squeezes her shoulder. "Hey, I'm messing with you." she chuckles back, nervously.

They continue to walk in the darkness for a while, and it's a pretty long distance for a pee, but… whatever. It's just nice to be there, alone with Liz.

"I'm glad you made it." Liz says all of a sudden, making Robin flinch in surprise. "What?" "I'm glad you came. To the party." "Oh, uhm, well, I think you should thank Hargrove for that. He practically dragged us here…" "You know-" the other girl interrupts her, pensive, "-People say that you're grumpy, surly… but I have never thought that. You… you're awesome! Way cooler than everyone else."

Robin's cheeks instantly go on fire. Is it her imagination, or it sounds a lot like a confession? Almost… a love confession. She can't stop questioning if she's misunderstanding things due to her mental state. She makes a small laugh, her stomach all flattered. "Well… thanks,

Liz." "Sorry, I'm drunk." "And I'm on psychedelics, so, no judgment."

They burst into a genuine laugh.

"It's just… I don't want you to think that I'm an idiot." "Idiot? Why?"
The red-head hesitates, uncomfortable.
"I know… you don't like my boyfriend. He seems to be an asshole, but I swear, he can be really sweet to me when we're alone. He's not how he looks."

Robin sighs. That's, really… an odd topic of conversation. She can't understand why Liz has put it up out of nowhere.
"Listen, Liz…" she stares at the girl, intensively and serious. "Are you trying to convince me, or yourself?" Liz gasps, speechless, so Robin continues to talk. Her mind is fuzzy and messed up, so she decides to let it go and just pull out what she needs to say, without boundaries. Go with the flow.

"Because yes, I don't like him. And yes, I believe that a nice, smart, kind girl like you is totally wasted on a piece of trash like him. But, hey, that's your life! You can't get conditioned by every person that doesn't agree with you, otherwise, you will never take the responsibilities for your choices. So, don't mind me. And if you love him, go for it."
Liz's features darken all of a sudden. She moves her sight to her feet, and exhales a long breath.

"I don't think I love him." she spats, sounding almost surrendered by that truth. Then, she lifts her look on Robin, and makes a small step ahead.

Robin freezes in her spot. Liz is near, so, so close to her. She can count her thousands of freckles. Is this happening for real? Because it totally looks like the girl is about to kiss her, right now.

They're in silence, and separated by barely a few inches, waiting for one of them to make a move. But they can't discover who the person would be, because a voice interrupts the moment, violently breaking the tense silence.

"Lizzie! I was looking for you. What are you doing here?!" of course

that it's Liz's asshole boyfriend. Who else would it be?
Liz instinctively takes a step back and turns to face him, slightly flushed and taken by surprise. "Chris! We were… we went here to pee."

Chris glares at Robin with pure, intense scorn. Jeez, that guy really needs to chill out a little. He stares at her for what looks like at least ten seconds straight, then, he grunts and orders to her girlfriend to go.

He puts an arm over her shoulders, while she's suddenly turned into a puppy with the tail between the legs, dismissive and accommodating. They make some steps, then Chris turns his head to Robin, and just spits out with all his disgust:"Dyke."

Robin can't help it. A raging, red sensation of anger boils into her veins. She makes a step ahead, clenching her fists.
"What did you just say?!"

Chris grins, looking all excited about the idea of an imminent confrontation. He leaves Liz and approaches Robin, staring right into her eyes like a predator with his prey.
"You heard me. I said dyke. Because that's what you are. You are a sick perv, Buckley, and you were also trying to make a move on my girlfriend. You're disgusting."
Those words hit her hard. And what is even harder is Liz, looking away, not bothering to defend her. That's the real, unbearable thing. She can feel her eyes start to water, uncontrollably.

"That's… that's not true! I wasn't…" she stutters, on the verge of a panic attack. Shit, this is so bad, being caught by the worst asshole in town, this is so… humiliating. The worst thing that could have ever happened to her.

"You what?!" Chris snaps towards her, ready to attack, but a person stops him with a violent shove that makes him draw back and almost losing his balance.

Chris gasps in surprise, looking wide-eyed at the figure of Billy, standing fiercely in front of him, fists clenched and cigarette leaning on his lips.

Steve appears next to Robin, squeezing her shoulder gently. "Robin, are you ok?" she nods, still confused for the sudden but timely intrusion of her friends.
"Hargrove… what the fuck?" Chris stutters. "Get the fuck out of my face." Billy hisses, venomously, and Robin finds herself thinking how the guy can look kinda scary when he wants.

Chris doesn't know when to give up. "What are you doing? Are you the defender of the dykes n…" he can't go on, Billy has clenched the collar of his shirt and had hurled him on the trunk of a tree. His eyes are wide, pupils blown, and he's breathing raggedly through his nostrils.

Steve instantly recognizes how the situation could get bad here, so he rushes to Billy and puts a hand on the boy's shoulders. "Billy, Billy, leave him, it's not worth it…" Chris, still under the boy's grip, laughs bitterly. "Yeah, why don't you listen to your boyfriend, Hargrove?"

And. That's it. Billy just takes a loading breath, and then he headbutts Chris, making the guy tumbling to the ground with a loud whine. Billy is about to kick him, when Steve grabs his biceps, in a desperate attempt to cool him off.

"Billy, stop! Let go, listen to me, goddamit!"

Chris, from the ground, tentatively reaches a hand on his eyebrow, finding his fingers covered in few droplets of blood. "You piece of shit! You're a goddam psycho, Hargrove! They have to lock you in a nuthouse and throw away the key!"

Billy is still trying to shove away Steve's grip, his face is a mask of pure, primordial rage. "Get off me!" he yells at Steve, looking like a mad animal in a cage.

Chris gets on his feet and points at them. "This will not end here. Remember, Hargrove." at these words, the boy squirms even more, held back only by Steve's intervention.
Chris eventually starts to walk away, while Liz gives them an apologetic look. "Guys… I'm so sorry…" Robin scoffs, now out of patience. "Go to your boyfriend, Liz." "I'm sorry Robin… I swear I am." "Just go." her voice comes out cold, and the hurt look on Liz's

face makes her heart twitch, but she deserves it. It's too late for frivolous apologies. What was she thinking when her boyfriend was busy insulting her?!

They disappear in the dark, while Billy gains some calm.

"Are you ok now, buddy? Can I leave you?" Steve asks, tentatively, receiving a grunt for response.
Robin finally stops to hold back her tears, and looks away, ashamed, covering her face with her hands.

Steve gets closer to her and encircles her shoulders with his arms. "Hey, hey, it's ok… it's nothing." he whispers into her ears, drawing circles on her back. She hugs him back, sobbing into the crook of his neck. "No, no it's not ok, Steve… he…he called me dyke. Multiple times."

"He's not gonna do that shit again." Billy's firm voice catches her attention. He's standing, jaw clenched and eyes still pointed where Chris has disappeared. "I won't let him." he adds, resolute, and Robin almost believes him.

She parts from Steve's grip and puts her arms on the other boy's his shoulders, pressing her head on his chest. Billy bolts in surprise, clearly not comfortable with physical contact, then, he tentatively hugs her back. They separated after some seconds, Robin has stopped crying and feels suddenly awkward about her emotional outburst.

She giggles, nervously, weeping her eyes and her cheeks with the back of her hand. "I guess nobody is gonna invite us to many parties after tonight." she jokes. Steve shrugs and rubs the back of his neck. "Well, you did a great musical performance, actually…" "Besides, you have never given a shit about parties, Buckley." Billy points out, crossing his arms.
"Yup. You're right about that." she agrees, smiling. "I guess you're the only person that still cares about the social hierarchy here, Hargrove." he scoffs in response. "Screw that. We don't need those people." Steve stares at him, visibly surprised. Then, he laughs. "Yeah, screw them. We're too cool for them." Billy rolls his eyes. "Now don't get your panties in a twist, princess. You're not that cool."

Robin looks at them and starts to feel her heart gets warmer. There's no more space for fear, and shame. She finds herself stupidly think about how lucky she is, to have those two idiots in her life. Idiots who are willing to do anything to protect her.

Stupidly, she remembers her board, her game with Steve. She wishes she could just put a new X for them.

"We rule." she declares, as a statement. Steve gives her a confused glare, while Billy smirks, all cocky.
"Yeah. We do, sweetheart."

Notes for the Chapter:

> ...I'm sorry. Seriously, I wanted to write about Billy, Steve and Robin getting high together and saying stupid stuff so bad <3

15. Smalltown boy

Summary for the Chapter:

Covering lovership

Notes for the Chapter:

Warning! There's some really fluffy smut here in the end...

Billy checks a second and then a third time the address on the small paper in his hand. Hawkins is indeed a cowshit town, but he wasn't prepared to find out that Robin's place was actually… a farm. That smells like cow's shit.

He jumps off the Camaro, thinking how he should try not to mock the girl about that, since she's helping him a lot with all that fake relationship story. But sometimes it's really hard to try to be less of an asshole, it requires a lot of effort. At least, for him.

He stalks towards the entrance on the gravel path, looking absent-mindedly at the fields and the cows in the distance. Robin's home is a colorful wooden cottage, decorated with bowls, flowers and succulents. It's actually pretty… nice? Like, happy-nice? Looks like a fairy home, all bucolic in the countryside.
He rings the bell, hearing a loud barking from the inside and a man yelling at the dog to make it stop.

The door opens, a tall man on his fifty appears, grabbing a huge black mastiff by the collar. He has a funny looking face, with big round glasses and thick dark curly hair.
"Ohhh, Billy! Welcome, my boy! I'm Joseph, so nice to meet you!" the tall man catches Billy's hand with the one that is not busy in holding back the dog, who, luckily, has stopped barking.

"Good evening, sir. Pleasure is mine." Billy says politely, putting his 'good boy mode' on. He has even worn his blue shirt, the one that he uses just for that kind of social occasion. As If he could trick his own father by disguising himself as a 'well dressed' person.

Robin's dad laughs. "Please, call me Joseph. No need for formality in this house, come on, come on in!" he steps aside, leaving space for Billy to surpass the doorjamb. He has a funny accent that Billy can't quite understand where it comes from, it sounds Scottish or something.

The interior of the house is warm and cozy, the wooden walls are fulfilled with posters, pictures and paintings, the furniture with plants; it's like there isn't a single empty spot in that place. There's a guy on the couch, laying loosely with a book on his lap, he doesn't look older than 25. Joseph leaves the dog that bolts to Billy and starts sniffing and nuzzling his feet. The dog is pretty big and kinda badass, so Billy can't help but flinch a little, feeling definitely like a pussy for that instinctive reflex.
Joseph laughs again, visibly amused. "Oh, no need to worry, boy! Michelle is a good girl." "Yeah, I can see that."

"So, you're Robin's boyfriend? You don't look like her type." the guy on the couch lazily comments, lifting his sight from his book. Billy needs to hold back a snarky replay and clenches his fists, going all tense.
"Nonsense!" Joseph snaps, waving his hands with his voice way too loud. "Such a handsome, healthy young man! Robin sure knows how to treat herself."

Uhm… ok? This is kind of uncomfortable.
Billy has no idea about what to say, those people seem freaks. Finally, Robin appears, rushing into the living room in her slippers. She grips her hair in exasperation at the sight of the scene, then, looks straight to Billy and exhales tiredly:"I'm sorry. I was the one supposed to open the door. Shall we go to my room?"

Billy shrugs casually. "Ok, no problem, Buck… I mean, Robin." Joseph sighs theatrically. "Robin! Are you embarrassed to introduce us to your boyfriend? How ungrateful child you are!" "He's NOT my boyfriend!" Robin grunts, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Told ya." spats the boy from the couch. "He looks way too popular to be Robin's type."

Billy glares at him, wishing he could just punch the annoying guy. Robin exhales a long breath, grips his wrist, and starts to drag him

rudely to her room.

"Keep the door open, young lady! Ahahah, I'm joking! Do what you want, you're a grown adult!" they can hear Joseph's shouting, causing a facepalm in the poor, way too embarrassed Robin.

They enter the room and she slams the door violently. Then, she points an intimidating finger to Billy, glaring at him in what is supposed to look like a threatening expression. "Shut the fuck up." he raises his hands in surrender. "I haven't said anything." "Well, don't."

Robin's room looks exactly like hers. Full of posters of punk, female bands, books, and instruments. The lair of the intellectual, weirdo girl.

"Hey… don't sweat it, Buckley. They're weirdos but they're not that bad. At least it seems they care about you. Wait to meet mine to understand what a really shitty family could be, you'll change your mind."

Robin blinks surprised at this important statement, then, she sighs and runs a hand through her hair. "I know, I know. They're not bad, but they're embarrassing! Believe me, what you saw… it's nothing!"

Billy just makes a small shrug and throw himself on her king-size bed with violet sheets, not caring at all to take off his dirty shoes. "Whatever. Your old-man has a strange accent…" "He's originally from Ireland." Robin explains, while starting to move objects and tidying up her room. "Mh. What about the other guy?" "My brother." "And your mum?" "Dead and buried."

At these words, Billy lifts his bored look on her, frowning slightly. "I'm…" "Don't be." Robin interrupts him and, well, ok, he was just trying to be nice with her. It's not that he really gives a shit about her dead mother, sorry not sorry.

"So, are we going to do this or what?" she urges him, opening the big doors of her closet. Billy sighs and starts to browse absently a photography book on Robin's bedside table. "Yup. Show me what you got, Buckley."

She dresses hastily, emerging from her closet with a pair of back denim and a gray shirt buttoned to the neck. Billy, at this sight, drops the book. "No fucking way." he spats, annoyed. "What?!" "Buckley." he jumps off the bed and approaches her, with an inquisitive frown on his face. "Could you not, for once in your life, being a dyke, tonight?" she rolls her eyes. "I don't know what you're talking about." "Please! That shirt is literally screaming how you like pussy. Put up something more feminine, for god's sake!"

She groans loudly and gets back in the closet, looking for the right combo. Billy is now waiting for her leaning on the threshold, scrutinizing her gestures with evident skepticism.
The next choice of Robin is a short, floral dress with a pronounced V neckline. Billy must admit that she looks good on that dress, she has a nice body that she's always hiding out with way too many layers of clothes. But still, it's not ok.

"Jesus, Buckley! Are you trying to make a good impression or to fuck my dad?!" Robin flushes, embarrassed and pissed off at the same time. "FINE!" she exclaims, throwing her arms in the air. "You chose. So you stop bitchin' about it." Billy groans but starts to search through her clothes, while Robin is whining near the big mirror.
"Too prude… too sexy… there's always something wrong! A person cannot dress as the fuck they want without finding critics about it!"
Billy sighs, while he continues the research. "You tell me, Buckley. I've been facing this shit for years."

Robin goes silent, surprised by the admission. For a minute straight, there's only the sound of Billy mumbling stuff between his teeth and moving Robin's clothes. Then, he finally reaches a dress for the girl.

"Put this on." he orders. "It's girlish but not too short. It's perfect."
Robin sighs and rudely snatches it from his hand.

"I hate this dress." "Whatever, Buckley."

He's tense, like, really tense. Even the music is not blasting at high volume from the speakers of his car with the usual arrogance. Robin can feel it, she always notices these kinds of stuff.

"Hey, it’s going to be ok." she assures him. Billy tightens the grip on the steering wheel. "It’s a stupid idea." "It’s not!" "What if he finds out? He’s not an idiot."
Yeah. What if he finds out? What if, the sudden freedom of that week is just a trick, and he gets back to beat him? His bruises have just faded.

"He won’t." Robin speaks gravely, looking straight at him. "Trust me."
Billy wants to do that.

Max has been warned. Obviously. But she can’t take back a sly smirk when the door opens with Billy and Robin theatrically hands to hands. Neil and Susan greet his pretended girlfriend all politely and fake.

"Hey, Robin." Max chirps at the girl, making Billy want to kick her shin instantly. "You know each other?" Neil asks, the shadow of suspect ever-present in his voice. Max shrugs casually. "She’s a friend of Steve. You know, the guy that babysits us, once in a while." at this poor explanation, Neil glares at the stepdaughter, looking for a lie in her voice. "Steve? As Steve Harrington?" then, he turns to face Billy, a mask of pure disgust. "Isn’t him the guy that you almost beat to death the previous year, Billy?"

This one sighs, putting all the efforts in keeping back his annoyance. "Dad, I don’t think it’s the right moment to talk about this…" Neil is about to talk back, but Robin intercepts him and speaks first. "They had a fight. But they’re ok now, Billy apologized. They’re buddies." "Super buddies!" Max exclaims, receiving a nasty glare from Billy.
Shut up, shut up, goddammit! Don’t mention Steve to him, you little bitch. He thinks in desperation.

Looks like Neil is using some time to decide if he can drop the topic or not. Then, in the end, he just says, in a tone that doesn’t leave any discussion:"Let’s get to the table."
Robin tightens the grip on Billy’s hand, starting to practically crush it.

The dinner passes lamely but quietly. That is the most important

thing. There are sporadic snide comments by Neil on Billy's behavior, Billy's way of dressing, Billy's hair, but Robin is always ready to talk back, to dissuade him politely.

Billy has to admit; she's really cool and clever. He has never seen anyone keep up with his father as she does, without being hostile, without antagonizing him in any way. It would be very nice if she were his real girlfriend, it would make everything way easier. But, he and Robin are destined to a complicated way of life.

He's keeping his role quite well too, caressing her hand, rubbing his thumb on her palm, gently squeezing her shoulder, flaunting how in love they are. Then, a moment arrives. It's awkward; she has just finished saying something funny and sweet about him, and Susan has chirped a long 'aaaw'. Neil's eyes are pointed at him, and he needs to show up how flattering Robin's words are, everybody is looking at them, expecting to see what couples usually do. So, he does it. It's fast, quick and chaste. But he does what he's supposed to do. He kisses her.

Robin freezes in her spot, caught by surprise. Luckily, it just lasts one second, but still; it's strange.

Billy has kissed a lot of people. A lot of girls. He even has fucked a few of them, even if he's not as experienced as the people believe. But Robin is different. She's not a nameless cow, she's… she's actually a great person. So, Billy feels guilty. That's an odd feeling! Guilty for having kissed someone… if anyone would have asked him a few months before, he would have simply laughed at the insinuation.

"Aren't they a beautiful couple?" Susan exclaims, over-excited. "Yeah, beautiful." spats Max, not hiding her irony. Billy glares at her, his eyes are literally screaming: 'you say something, Maxine, and I fucking kill you'.

Eventually, the torture ends, and they can finally get into the Camaro. Once inside, once safe, Billy hits hard the steering wheel with his forehead, letting a long, tired, groan.
"Shut up, Buckley." he spats, venomous. "I haven't said anything!"
"Then don't."

Billy exhales, his head still pressed on the steering wheel, exhausted. "That was so, so embarrassing…" he can practically feel Robin's sympathetic look on him, and he hates that. How low can a person fall? Because in the last period, between the Mind Flayer, him vomiting black, disgusting, slugs, him crying like a baby in the shower and losing control multiple times, he feels like he has reached the bottom and has started to scrap it.

His pride is completely shattered.
He can feel it, he's about to freak out, again. His pulse is accelerated, the oxygen in his lungs is lacking, his hands are sweating.

Not again, not now. Stop it! Stop being a fucking pussy. He thinks, grinding his teeth. Then, Robin speaks to him. Her voice is low, and soothing. And what she says has the power to distract him from his erupting panic attack.

"That was my first kiss."
Billy turns slightly towards her, face covered with the chaotic hank of his hair. "What?"
"I said… that was my first kiss. The one you gave me."

Ok… this is kinda difficult to process. Billy blinks, surprised. Robin is absently watching at the road in front of her, her arm crossed and her face unreadable.
"That… wasn't even a proper kiss, Buckley." she shrugs. "Than I guess that makes me still a 'kiss-virgin'."

He starts to think that he has understood what she's doing. She's trying to make him feel less bad by sharing her secrets, something to be 'ashamed' of. That is kind of… nice? She really is a nice person, under that thick skin of "wannabe bitch" that she drags off with herself. Steve is so lucky to have her as a friend. But maybe… maybe they're friends too? That is what friends do all the time, help each other.

"Robin…" he whispers, almost shyly, and he can't really recognize his own voice. "Thanks for everything."
Finally, she turns to see him, and makes just a small, sly, smirk. Her trademark sassy expression.
"Don't sweat it, Hargrove." she says, in a poor attempt of imitating

him.

He hasn’t got much time.

Since when he has dropped Robin home he has driven like a maniac. He could have about an hour, he could take the excuses of his lateness due to staying at Robin’s place to greet his father, spend some time smoking at the porch or something. That sounds like a good excuse.

So, when he rings the bell, there’s no time for flirting, challenging, staring, or stupid stuff like that. When Steve opens the door, he rushes to his mouth, leaving him barely space to close it. Steve makes a surprised sound, muffled through the kisses, while Billy is pushing him to the leaving room, almost making them losing balance in that tumultuous battle of mouths.

When they part to gain some air, Steve giggles. "I guess the dinner went fine." Billy has started to kiss his neck, greedy. "I don’t want to talk about that." he hisses on Steve’s skin. Then, he slightly moves back to watch Steve in the eyes, his hands still gripping the boy’s shirt.

"I kissed Robin." he declares, smirking. Steve rolls his eyes in response. "Is that an attempt to make me jealous? Because, between us, you’re the one that acts like a jealous freak, Hargrove." there’s no venom in his voice, he’s playing. He is teasing.

Steve’s arms are still anchored on his hips, while they’re standing in the center of the living room, just a few meters from the sofa, the final goal that they need to reach.
Billy groans in annoyance. "Excuse me, princess, if I’m not comfortable with the idea that you’re still hanging out with the girl who messed you up so much." it’s a confession, a confession of insecurity and weakness. Steve laughs. "Is that so? Are you really… worried about this?"

Billy scoffs and makes a step back, suddenly interrupting their physical contact. How did they end up talking about that? They were supposed to making out at that moment. Nancy Wheeler is sure not

the topic of discussion that Billy wants to face now. But, he guesses he can't avoid it forever. And that night, after all that pathetic made-up dinner with his family, he feels quite riled up and exposed. His tongue just runs for him, spitting the words that are hidden deep in his troubled brain.

"I don't want to be her replacement." Billy spats, looking away, because, yep, he definitely reached the bottom and scrap it. He has gained the award of 'biggest pussy in history' after that.
Steve gasps in surprise, then, he takes a step ahead and cups Billy's face with his hands. He's watching at Billy, barely a few inches apart, so intense, so serious, that the boy can't help but shiver a little.

"I like you." he states, resolute. "Put it in that curly head of yours." he pokes Billy's temple playfully. "Stick it in that messy pretty brain. I like you, a lot."

Billy lifts his sight to him, feeling his cheeks heated up by Steve's words. "Do you understand that, mh?" as to prove it, Steve starts to kiss him, this time gently, slowly. He starts with his chin, tracing the outline of his mouth. Then, he moves to the jawline. Billy is frozen dumbly on his spot, letting Steve doing his treatment. He just puts a hand on Steve's fluffy hair and starts to caress it, feeling those beautiful smooth locks through his fingers. God, he missed that.

"I like the shape of your mouth." Steve declares, out of nowhere, on his neck. Billy scoffs. "What?!" "…Like the face you make when you're pissed, the grimaces that you do when you're annoyed…" Steve continues, between the kisses, completely ignoring the other. Billy laughs and tilts his head, while he can't hold back a chill caused by the gentle touch of the boy.

"Well, I'm flattered, Harrington…" he jokes, but Steve speaks again, interrupting him. "I like your nose. I like your nostrils, how they move when you exhale a long breath…" Billy chuckles again. "Ok, Steve… this is weird." "I like your hair. It seems rough to the touch, but then, when you stick your fingers in it, you find out that your curls are soft." Steve has started to unbutton his shirt, slowly, languidly.

Billy swallows. Yep, this is definitely weird, but also… awesome?

When he speaks, he's surprised to hear his voice cracked, it doesn't sound like his anymore.
"What else do you like?"

Steve takes off his good-boy blue shirt and drops it to the floor. He contemplates absently his chest for a while, then, he leans and starts to kiss his clavicle. Billy lets out a small moan and tightens the grip on the boy's hair.

"I like your eyes. They're blue, but like, deep blue, like the ocean that you miss so much. It's like you always bring what you love in your gaze, always with you."
Steve slides down to his sternum while Billy must bite his lip to not to start puffing like a wet bitch. Damn this guy and the effect that has on him with just a few kisses.
"I like your freckles. Damn, I love your freckles."

Steve licks his nipple, and this time Billy can't help it; a strangled, uncontrolled moan gets off his mouth.
"I like your eyelashes. They're long, almost girlish. Cute." he continues, moving his treatment to his abs. "I like the color of your skin. It's like… you have the sun with you. The sun and the ocean…"

He unzips Billy's pants and goes lower and lower, bending on his knees, until he meets the waistband of his boxer.
Yup, today Billy wore underwear to feel more like a good boy.

"I like your smell." and, as for strengthening the concept, he takes a long breath through his nose, inhaling Billy's scent on his groin. "I like your cologne, but I also like the natural smell of your skin. Gosh, I think I even like your sweat."

Gross. Billy giggles, petting Steve's head tenderly. Then, the boy gets up and move him gently to the coach. Looks like he wants to be in control today… and Billy can't say that he doesn't like it.

Steve is over him and he's taking off the remaining clothes, his gaze pointed on Billy's, so intense that he feels he can melt under that look. He leaves him like this, completely naked, under his scrutinizing eyes, laying down on his back under his still completely dressed body. Steve moves his eyes all over his body, craving it.

Then, he says one of his trade-mark dork kinds of stuff.

"I definitely like your cock."

Billy can't help it, he burst into a laugh because jeez, how can he be an idiot even those kinds of moments?
"I'm serious!" Steve retorts, faking offense. "I never thought that I would like a dude's dick… but yours… it's yours! So I like it, because it's perfect, as you are." he starts to caresses Billy's tights.

Damn. He's a fucking, impossible, bleeding heart. Billy looks away, flushing, when Steve moves his hand on him and starts to stroke him slowly, tentatively. He's completely exposed, both physically and emotionally, and that makes him nervous and excited at the same time.

Steve strokes him more steadily, his eyes pointed on Billy's who finally lifts his gaze on him. He's panting, uncontrollably, watching Steve right into his eyes, his look in a beautiful, concentrated frown.

"Steve…" he stutters, already dangerously near his climax. Steve interrupts the eye contact and finally kisses him, until he swallows his long, almost painful, orgasm.
"I like you." he whispers into his mouth. "I like you, Billy. Stick it into your head, because I'm gonna say that again, over and over."

Billy smiles back. For once, a genuine smile.
"Please do."

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hey there!
>
> So... I invented completely Robin's home enviroment out of nowhere ahaha I don't know, I liked the idea of the extravagant countryside type family. I wanted to put somewhere Robin's dad awkwardly playing some folk song to entertain Billy, but I have avoided it in the end for you. Too much ahaha. My mind is delirious.
>
> Also, don't worry, this is not a RobinxBilly fic if it's

not clear, I wanted to insert the kiss thing just to contribute to make their rising friendship even more solid and strong. You'll see in the next chapter how they become BFF at school lol

That's it, feel free to share your feelings as usual and apologies for the typos, as usual.

16. People ain't no good

Summary for the Chapter:

School life troubles

Notes for the Chapter:

I know nothing about American schools, so, sorry if it's ridicolous, I just use what I saw in tv series ahahah

"Hargrove, could you… stop drawing dicks on my notebook?"

Billy looks at her, motionless, with a wide smirk plastered on his face.
"Nope. I don't think so."

Robin groans, exasperated. It has been just three days since school has started, with new, odd normality made by her and Billy sitting together in classes, walking together in corridors, having lunch together, and always making snarky comments on the other idiots in the school.

Their new, unexpected friendship has been taken in various ways by the fellow students: some of them, mostly the jocks and popular kids, are already avoiding Billy due to his recent fight with Chris, a top-dog of the hierarchy. The girls look pissed by his spending too much time with Robin, they're constantly whispering bad stuff at her in the corridors, asking themselves 'what he finds in her'. Rumors have already started to spread, but Billy guesses it's just a temporary settlement that will eventually fade when the cows and the preppy kids will find out something else to talk about. His crown has been disrupted, that's for sure. He's the new Steve Harrington of the situation, but way cooler and more popular.

School has started already hitting hard on them. The teachers have started to give them assignments from the very first day; adding his new job at the workshop with all that and the eventually secretive sneaking in Steve's home, Billy has found himself with a very short

spare time left.

"Seriously, Billy, stop it!" Robin barks, trying to keep her voice down since they're in the middle of English class. "I know how you like it but stop vandalizing my stuff!" Billy scoffs. "I'm bored. This class sucks." "Well, learn how to entertain yourself like a grown adult, dumbass."

Billy sighs and leans back on the chair, spreading his legs under the table. Mrs. Ingold is giving them a lecture about Virginia Woolf today, for Robin's happiness, since she's so into feminist literature and shit. Billy couldn't care less. While his desk-partner is too focused on the teacher's speech, he reaches a hand to her notebook and starts to draw another dick, sneaky, like a ninja. This time, he puts all his effort into a realistic and detailed art piece, adding veins and hairs and a big sprinkle of spunk. When Robin finally notices the drawing, she can't help hitting Billy in the shoulder and yelling aloud.

"Seriously?! Again?! FUCK YOU, HARGROVE!"

The whole class turns to them with a curious gaze. The teacher is gasping, interdicted and partly offended by the sudden interruption. Robin clears her voice, turning red, while Billy is still smirking, totally undisturbed.

"Uhm, I'm sorry Missis. Ingold… I didn't… I didn't meant to interrupt you."

The woman sighs, out of patience. "No, please, Miss Buckley. You've been chit-chatting with Mr. Hargrove during all my class. Why don't you share with us what's that about?"
"Nothing. Seriously. Go on, I promise it won't happen again." Robin mumbles. "No, it will not. Because, for today, both of you earned detention. You're going to stay here and clean the class to perfection, so the next time you two want to take my lesson as an opportunity to mind your own business, you will think about your actions first."
At these words, Billy springs on his feet, groaning. "This is bullshit!" Robin grabs his wrist and gently drags him back to the chair, in an attempt to cool him off. Everybody is sniggering. Billy can see that, they're just waiting for one of his outbursts, like he's some sort of phenomenon. Screw them.

"You're making it worse, Mr. Hargrove. I suggest you watch your attitude, young boy. You're a senior now, and immature behaviors aren't tolerated anymore."
Finally, Mrs. Ingold gets back to her speech, while Billy is mumbling an indefinite number of insults between his teeth.

One good thing about that shitty day is basketball. He's finally back on track playing and he really needs to discharge the tension that he has accumulated in those hours. The fact that Steve is not at school with them anymore is pretty sad, but the fact that he's not on the team is way too depressing.

Not that he and Steve had a good relationship on the court, it's more like the contrary. But he loved to give the guy shit at every practice, shoving him off on the floor and stealing the ball like a ninja. It fucking satisfied him, remark his new status with the game.

But, of course, in that damned last year that good thing needed to stop. There are some new players on the team, and one of them is a tall, dark-haired muscular dude with an ugly face deformed in a horrible sneer. He has a band-aid on his eyebrow where he has been hit just a few days before. Chris fucking Robinson is in the team. Great! How lucky he could be.

So, the game is wild. Nothing compared to the one with Steve, who didn't even try to compete with him. No. Chris and Billy are playing hard, pushing themselves violently to the ground, playing for the supremacy of the alpha male of the court. And, Billy has to admits, Chris is kind of good at basketball. He's strong but fast, agile, their abilities are more or less equivalent. And that's a problem because Billy doesn't know the sportive competition, he just fights to win and crash the adversary.

He finds himself even more tense and angry after practices. He guesses he's really the new Steve Harrington of the school, goddammit. Was he this bad to Steve? Probably yes. Probably even worse.

He showers scraping his skin almost with violence, full of nervous energy that he really needs to release, then he hastily dresses up. He's

still bare chest when that obnoxious, idiotic voice talks behind him.

"They should give a different locker room for those like you."

Billy tightens the grip on the shirt and grits his teeth. He talks without twisting to face the guy, because he's not sure for how long he can hold back the fists.
"Excuse me?"
"I said, they should give a different locker room for the people like you. You see, Hargrove, I'm not comfortable in showering next to you. Something bad might happen. What if you get a hard-on watching me? That would be harassment, you know."

You fucking wish. He thinks, taking a long, difficult inhale. Ok, he needs to calm down, to count to ten or something, making rational reasoning about what's happening. Steve might be angry if he killed the guy just there. He doesn't like him being violent, or irrational. But still, this time it's not his fault, isn't it? The guy totally deserves it, Billy is not bullying him or something.Iit's more like the contrary, so, beat the guy to death would be self-defense. It's survival.

He decides to try to be a grown adult, like Robin and Steve would like him to be. He can give the asshole a warning, a very mature and very reasonable warning.
He turns to face him, a little mad smirk on his face. Robinson is not alone, there are two guys next to him, like he doesn't even have the balls to confront him like a real man.

"Robinson. You know… this whole situation, of you, trying to make me react. It can't end up well. I'm trying to be friendly here, reasonable. So now, I suggest a truce." Robinson is glaring at him, grinning in excitement, with his thugs as bodyguards. *Jesus, what a loser.* Billy thinks that he would deserve a medal just for being this patient with the guy. That is way beyond altruistic.

"You apologize to me and we forget about this story. Otherwise… I don't know, man. I got no choice here. I have to fucking kill you."
Robinson scoffs. "You think that's funny." Billy makes a step ahead, approaching the guy, fists clenched and ready to strike. "You think that's some kind of joke?" he makes a small, theatrical laugh. "Nah… I'm damn serious here." finally, looks like the heaviness of his sight

makes the asshole a little more serious. His grin fades.

"Apologize to you…" Robinson hisses, venomous. "…Faggot."

Ok. Billy has tried. He did, ok? He has been rational and mature, he fucking put a gigantic effort in even talking to that dude. But still, he has continued to disrespect him. So, he must do it, there's no possible other choices. He must beat the shit out of him. Fucking break those big bones, erase his ugly sneer.

He's about to punch him, when, with perfect timing, the coach enters the locker room and glares at them. "What the hell is going on here?!"

Billy and Chris keep heavy, dense eye contact. Then, Robinson just speaks, all calm and collected:"Nothing coach. It's all peachy." the coach sighs back. "Well, take your problems out of court. Now move, ladies. Chop chop. No, not you, Hargrove. Need to talk to you a minute."

Before leaving, Chris spats something like 'it's not over yet' between his teeth, making Billy want to spit into his face. The guy is so fucking banal. Then, the coach gives him a stern look, and the boy can already understand what he's going to say next.

"I want a clean game this year, Hargrove. Don't you think I don't know what you did to Harrington. You need to know that something like that will not be tolerated anymore."
What?! Is he serious?! Why is he giving that lecture to him and not to the idiot that has started all that shit?!

"Sir, It's not my fault, I…" "It never is, isn't it?" after these words, the coach leaves him, not without a long, stern look.
Shit. That year is gonna be tough.

So, it has been three days and he has just gained detention, an almost fight, and a rumor spread in all the corridors about him being a fag. Fuckin fantastic.
"Why does he hate me so much?" Billy mumbles, while moping the floor with all his energy. Robin shrugs. "Maybe he's secretly in love with you." he scoffs, feeling nauseous at the idea. "I wouldn't touch

him even if he was the last man on earth."

Someone opens the door of the class, and a short, red-head girl appears. She looks uncomfortable, ruffling nervously a lock with her fingers and squirming on her spot like a jumpy bird. Billy and Robin glare at her, showing aloud how not welcome she is.

"What do you want?" spats the blonde, throwing her cleaning cloth on the desk and crossing her arms. Elizabeth sighs. "Can I talk to you a minute, Robin?" the internal battle in Robin is visible on her face. It seems like she's trying to stay angry with her but failing miserably. Her shoulders lose some tension while she makes a long sigh. "Ok." "Ok?!" Billy grunts, annoyed. Robin rolls her eyes. "I can take a break of five minutes." she declares, while leaving the classroom, followed by the other girl.

Billy yells at her back. "Yeah, no problem Buckley! I can go on alone!", but she's already gone, leaving Billy to angrily spend his detention by himself.

"So?" outside the classroom, Robin is glaring at her, arm-crossed. Liz takes some time to respond, looking for the right words.
"I'm sorry about what happened…"
"Yeah. You already said that."

Robin feels genuinely bad for being a bitch with her, but she's still too pissed off. Her behavior has been unacceptable, looking at her boyfriend insulting her without saying a word to her defense. Robin understands. She understands that Liz is intimidated by him, that she is totally under the thumb, but still, it's not a good excuse. That was too humiliating, and seeing her by his side has been a thorn in her heart.

Liz looks away.
"I dumped him."
Robin blinks. Ok, that is unexpected.

"You… dumped him." she repeats, like she's making sure to have heard it right. Liz nods, finally looking straight into her eyes. She looks sad, devastated. Robin feels her anger evaporating away.

"Why did you do that?" she finds herself asking, uncontrollably. "I mean, he's an asshole, a total jerk, but…" "I don't like him." Liz interrupts her. "I don't know If I ever liked him at all. I was with him just… because it's what I was supposed to do. Have you ever had the impression that your life is not yours? That you haven't any choices, that everything is already programmed to your… social role or something. Like you're an actor, and always need to act. You can't be yourself." Liz has gradually raised her voice, becoming more and more upset.

Robin rubs the back of her neck. "I don't know. I've never been exactly keen on social roles." "I know." Liz sighs. "This is why I want to be like you."

Be… like her? Ok. That is beyond unexpected. Liz continues to talk. "You, Billy, and Steve… you are who you are. I admire you all. You're brave, and proud. I don't want to hide anymore. I have this grip of anxiety in my chest that is telling me to stop acting. To finally let go, be free."

Robin gasps. "What do you mean…?"

This time, Liz decides to answer the question with facts. It's sudden and quick. She moves her lips on Robin's, there, in the middle of the corridor. A surprised uncontrolled sound comes out from Robin's mouth, while she feels frozen, speechless and motionless.

Liz smiles, there's no trace of hesitation on her look. "Would you go out with me?" "Like… on a date?" Robin stutters, feeling like an idiot. "Like on a date, yeah."
What follows is a discrete number of seconds passed just in the realization of the question. Then, Robin almost shouts. "YES!" Liz chuckles at her amusing reaction, making her instantly blushing. "I mean… yeah, I'd love to!"

"Cool." "…Cool."

Robin feels the urge to kiss her again, this time properly, but she knows she can't afford to do that right there. It's a miracle that nobody has caught them before. So, better to try to be discrete. Seems still impossible to believe that Liz has kissed her in the first

place. Sure, at the bonfire Robin has perceived a weird… electricity between them, but she never had any high hope about the real possibility of it. Now seems that things are finally going the right way.

When she gets back to class, she has an idiotic gigantic smile spread on her face. She finds Billy busy in carving something on the desk with a cutter (instead of cleaning like how he was supposed to do), so focused on his work that he hardly acknowledges her arrival.

"What did the princess want?" he spats, annoyed, never leaving his eyes on his complex operation. "Apology." "Tsks. Tell me you said her to fuck off." "Actually…" Robin hesitates, uncertain. Then, she realizes that she has nothing to hide from Billy, since apparently, they're new BFF or something. "She kissed me."

Billy stops and lifts his gaze, frowning his eyebrows in confusion. "She what?" "You heard that, Hargrove. And she asked me to go out on a date. And I said yes." Billy just blinks his eyes for some seconds, surprised. Then, he drops the cutter and slides his hands to his face. "Fuck me…" "Yeah. It was kind of unexpected for me too."

"Well, that's great. Isn't it? What about crazy eyes?" "Who?" "Robinson. Her asshole boyfriend." "Oh. Uhm… apparently, she dumped him." "She dumped him." Billy repeats, like he isn't sure to have heard the information properly, and honestly, Robin can't blame him. It's all pretty difficult to believe.

After some time spent in some deep thinking, Billy exhales a long breath and leans back on the chair. "Now I get it. Why he was being so cocky with me." he spats. "What do you mean?" Billy lets out an ugly laugh. "He takes it on me because he knows that his woman has dumped his ass for another woman, but it's easier to go alpha on me than you because, well, you're a girl. It wouldn't be fair."

Robin grimaces, feeling her blood instantly boil in anger. There are so many misogyny, toxic masculinity and ridiculous machismo in all that supposition that she really wants to bang her head against a wall. "But he doesn't even know that you're gay." she objects. "I think it hardly matters. He needs someone to confronts with. And I'm just the best person."

Maybe Billy is right. Chris is looking for a fight, a real one, and he can only find it from a guy. Billy is the ideal scapegoat.

"You know…" Billy speaks with a pensive voice, "…I think I understand. I was like him, when… you know, when I hurt Steve. Had lots of shit going on and he had been the right person at the right moment, or the contrary, depending on how you want to see it."

Robin makes a few steps ahead, getting closer to him. "What happened next?" Billy shrugs in response. "Things got worse. I got possessed, killed people…" "Yep. I do reckon that." "But also, this fucked up thing with Steve started, and then Max, and you, and all the others… I don't know. I guess I was just tired to be alone, so I gave it a try." Billy's features are softer while he's saying that. His mouth is cracked in a little smile, his eyes pointed on the window.

"So… are you saying that you pity him?"

Billy snaps from his reverie, his face goes instantly emotionless and cold. "Hell, no. I just say that I understand." "Still, that's pretty empathetic to say. Maybe Steve is turning you to a cuddler too." he scoffs, annoyed. "Bitch, please! I will end that dude when it will come the moment of our fight. With my bare hands. I don't give a shit, I have to do this." Robin groans. "You don't HAVE to do anything, Billy, it's not the freaking Far-West!" he dismisses her with a wave of his hand, mumbling something between his teeth.
Robin moves next to him and gasps surprised at the sight of the new piece of art made by his raging talent.

"Did you fucking carve a dick on the desk, Hargrove?"
The other just shrugs in response.

The only good thing about that bad, obnoxious day is Steve. After work and a quick stop at home for a shower, he rushes to Casa Harrington, speeding up with his blue Camaro, blasting Slayers through the speakers.

As usual, once crossed the threshold of the house their mouths are already crashing, fulfilling the absence of one another. After a long making out session and a reciprocal handjob they can finally speak

again, way more relaxed and inclined to conversation. Billy tells Steve about the day, the detention and then the almost fight with Robinson. Of course, the princess gets his panties in a twist immediately. They're spread out on the big couch, Steve's arms leaned on the back of the sofa and legs open wide while Billy is making a joint.

"Dude… why don't you just drop it?"

Billy groans. "Harrington. That dickhead provoked me, he sought it out. Don't worry, I can take him with my eyes closed." Steve sighs. "I'm not worried about this, Billy… it's just… you have a record in this town. If something bad happens, you might be expelled from school, or kick out of your home, or…" "Hey." Billy interrupts him, glaring at him ferine while licking the paper. "Stop overthinking. It's going to be ok."

Steve isn't convinced. He runs his fingers to his hair and makes a long exhale, his face visibly concerned. "Can't you just… drop this macho challenge and let it go, for once in your life?" Billy scoffs. "I can't believe you said the word 'macho', Stevie. You're spending too much time with Robin."

Steve points a finger. "Actually, you're the one that is spending too much time with Robin, since now you're in classes together. Anyway, I'm just trying to say that is not worth it. You take it personal, as if the guy has insulted your pride or something, but actually, he is just a douchebag that needs someone to unload his frustration on. Easy."

Billy lights the joint and takes a long drag, his eyebrows frowned, looking thoughtful. "I'll think about that." he spats, after a long pause, making Steve smile in response. "Good boy." he chirps, reaching the joint and sliding it out the boy's fingers.

They end up watching 'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre', Steve has brought it from work under Billy's request. Of course, at the first gore scene where Leatherface hooks the blond chick up to the ceiling, Steve becomes all jumpy. Figures. Pussy. Billy mocks him, sincerely amused by the boy's easy impressionability.

"Oh come on, pretty boy! It's just a movie, there is no bad man with a

saw out there. You can sleep tight." Actually, there are other monsters equally dangerous, but that's another discourse. Steve grimaces, faking irritation over fear. "It's just that this movie sucks, man." "This movie is fucking awesome." "You got such a morbid taste there, Hargrove."
They eat Steve's 'authentic Italian' spaghetti while finishing the movie. When they arrive at the scene where Leatherface waves his chainsaw in frustration while Marilyn Burns hops on the truck and laughs hysterically covered in blood and dirt, Billy practically jumps in enthusiasm.

"Fuck yeah! So this is a real ending. I've been wanting to re-watch this movie for years!" "So you already watched it?" Steve asks, slightly surprised. "Yep. At the drive-in with Nathan, couple years ago." only after saying this, Billy has the urge to bite his own tongue. He didn't mean to talk that much. Maybe his mind was still fuzzy from the glorious ending of the movie, this at least would explain how come he can't keep his mouth shut.

Obviously, Steve instantly twitches in interest. "Nathan? Is he your boyfriend?!" Billy grunts. "I'm pretty sure you're my boyfriend now, idiot." again. Why can't he just shut up? Steve becomes paralyzed, eyes wide in stupor, while Billy wishes he could just cut off his vocal cords.

"Are we… boyfriends?" the dork asks, and god! If there's anything more embarrassing. He doesn't want to look like a thirteen-year-old girl with a big crush. So, he plays cool, as usual.

"Don't get all worked up, Harrington. We're not gonna exchange rings." Steve flushes. Jesus. He's cute. Way too cute.

"No, I mean… I'm ok with that. I mean, I'm glad to be your boyfriend." they stare at each other awkwardly for some seconds, then, Billy just groans. "Fine. Boyfriends. But let's drop here the topic, this sounds like a conversation between two pussies in heat and it's really, really making me uncomfortable." Steve laughs and pokes his chest playfully. "Aww! You're so bad at feelings, Big Boy! You should learn how to open up your heart a little." "Whatever." mumbles Billy, rolling his eyes.

"So… who is Nathan?"
Yep. Steve has definitely not forgot about the accidental infamous mention.

"No one. Old story." "It's just…" the brunette sighs, squirming in his spot. It looks like he's searching for the right words in his mind. "… You mentioned him before. And it seems that you have a lot of memories of him. The tapes, the concerts… I have the impression that you have spent a lot of time with this person."

Shit. He needs to learn when to shut up. Steve's right, he mentioned him, even if calling him a 'girl'. And Steve is also right about the 'having a lot of memories' with him.
He sighs. He's going to talk about one of the fucking arrows that are stuck in his heart for the first time in more than a year.

"We were together. For a while. Then it ended bad. Really bad."
Steve is staring at him with a curious glare. He makes a small nod, trying to be encouraging. Billy sighs again. God, that's difficult.

"He was an asshole. I mean, I wasn't any different, but he was a fine piece of shit. Fucking rich kid, playing the rebel. I met him in a club and we started hanging out together. Then, we became a thing. I became his secret." Billy can't hold back the bitterness that cracks his voice. He keeps on avoiding eye contact with Steve, because he's not really sure if he can take it.

"It lasted nearly nine months. My life was a mess, but we were together, me and him, against the world. And I had the impression that, with him by my side, I could make it. I could win my battles."

Silence follows. The atmosphere becomes tenser. "What happened?" Steve questions in a whisper. Billy opens his mouth to speak, then stops. What he is about so say takes a lot of effort.

"We got caught. We were in his car, in the backseat… we were… doing things." he flushes a little at that awkward confession. "Max snitched on me. She didn't do it on purpose, but still… I hated her so much for that. Couldn't even watch her without getting mad." Steve gets tense, a concentrated frown on his brows. He looks like he's putting together the pieces of that messed up puzzle that his life is.

"Neil caught us. And obviously, he beat me almost to death. He sent me to the fucking hospital." Billy makes an ugly, bitter laugh. There's nothing to laugh about that, but what else can he do? A sudden, foreign sensation gets on his senses. He lowers his gaze, finding Steve's hand on his knee, almost clenching it. Then, he moves his sight on the other boy's face, and his eyes are urging him to go on.

"That wasn't even the worst part. The cherry on the top of that massive cake of shit, was that I didn't actually know who Nathan really was." Steve gives him a questioning look. Billy sighs, defeated. "His father. He was some sort of big fish. He was… running for the election, to be major or something." Steve gasps in surprise because, yes, that's pretty fucked up.

"He was the head of the conservative party, fuck If I know, I don't understand politics. However, he was the last person on earth that needed to have a junkie, punk-ass fag for son as a scandal. That shit could really ruin his career, and he was powerful, really powerful and, let's say, unscrupulous. I got myself in really, deep shit even if didn't know what I was doing at all."

The grip on his knee tightens. "What happened next?" Steve's voice is firm, atone. "Well… situation got too far. We have been told to move the fuck out of San Diego. Of course, seeing Nathan again was more than banned, even thou… I wasn't… I didn't think he could be influenced by those kinds of stuff."
"What do you mean?" Steve lifts one brow in confusion.

Shit. That is the most painful part. Where Billy reveals how pussy he is, how weak and pathetic he has been in his ingenuity in putting his trust in that guy and his bullshits. Like a freaky fucking fairy that stills believes in fairytales.

"I thought… I don't know. I thought that we were stronger than that. It has been us, us against the world. We were mighty, we did a lot of shit together and he never, never got scared. I was the pussy one compared to him!" Steve grimaces at that. "Instead…" Billy continues, lifting his head to the ceiling. "…He got terrified. He fucking told me that he didn't want to see me again, to disappear from his life, forever. He was scared shitless by his father; I've never seen him like this! He was like a totally, different person."

Yup. Big tough boys turning into harmless kittens with their fathers. That's kind of common, isn't it? Billy can understand that. But it doesn't change the fact that he can't accept it, anyway.

"Then… I understood. Our war, our anger, our battles… us stealing things, making money, doing drugs, going to concerts… all bullshit. He was just a spoiled, rich kid with a father complex who pretended to be a big rebel. I could have… I should have understood that before. I had never seen his place, he owned a fancy car, he never spoke about his past… but I was blind. All I could see was who I perceived as the coolest dude on earth." Billy covers his face with his hands and lets out an angry grunt. Then, he clenches his hair, and it's almost painful but yet so relieving.

"So stupid… I was… fucking idiot. Fucking… faggot."

He can't hold back the tears, while his body starts to tremble uncontrollably. Steve encircles his shoulders with his arms and rubs his hands on him, whispering into his ears.

"Hey, hey, it's ok…"

Billy has still his face covered with the palms of his hands and the fingers sinked in his hair, while Steve's voice starts to soothe him. He's not sure if he's ashamed of being seen this weak anymore, since Steve has seen him in all the worsts states, and he has never mocked him, has never called him pussy or something. Maybe Billy would have done that. Or maybe not. He's not sure if he knows himself anymore, with all that happened in those crazy weeks he reckons how he's changed. And it's all Steve's credit, he has kept him under his protective wing and prevented him from drowning in the abyss of his own consciousness. Steve… is too good for him. Billy doesn't know how to handle that, sometimes he feels somehow guilty to have the boy in his life. Like he doesn't deserve something so good, considering how bad he actually is. That's not fair, that's not how karma should work.

"If it can console you, I had a relationship that was, literally, bullshit too." Steve jokes in his ear, making a sad, low laugh. "Thing is… we can't erase the bad things that happened to us. All we can do is trying to get the best through them, let them teach us a lesson."

Billy scoffs. "It doesn't work for me, Harring…" "Listen to me." Steve interrupts him and grabs his chin, forcing him to watch him into the eyes. "Pain is never, never useless. It makes us the way we are, and helps us grow and evolve." Billy shakes his head, irritated by Steve's nonsense. "I'm telling you, it's not useful. All that shit that happened didn't make me wise or something. Just really, really angry, and more and more fucked up." "Maybe. But that's the old, Billy Hargrove. The one that beat me that night at the Byers, the one that discharged on others his suffering."

Billy blinks, interdicted. Steve looks so damn sure about that…

He rubs a thumb on his chin, looking at him with an intense glaze that is making Billy melt on his spot.

"This Billy Hargrove… this one is learning how to trust people again. How to create new boundaries. Because he wants to be better, and he wants to stop suffering, once for all. But you need to stop being angry… with the world, but most of all with yourself. Anger rots in your vein, poisons your system. Stop being angry, even with those who hurt you, is not something that you do for them. It's something that you do… for yourself. It's a gift for yourself."

Billy grits his teeth. "I can't… I hate him… so much." Steve nods and gently caresses his cheek. "I know. But give yourself some time." he leans forward and presses a gentle kiss on the boy's nose. "I promise you that it will stop aching, that wound. It won't sting again, anymore. As I said, I got you, baby."

Billy shivers and tries to dissimulate the heavy effect that those words have on him with a joke. "That's the faggest thing that I ever heard, Harring…" the other boy silences him with a kiss, then another one, then a third, gripping his chin with his hands, keeping Billy's head still.

"Bla bla bla… you're a bleeding heart, Harrington. Don't get your panties in a twist, pretty boy." Steve imitates his voice, making the other laugh on reflex. He can't help it. Steve is such a dork that can make his heart lighten up so easily; Billy might think that the guy has super-powers too.

"Screw you, I don’t sound like that." Billy spats, irritated, but however, he’s talking between the kisses, holding Steve’s collar of the shirt. Steve laughs back and sinks one hand into his hair. The guy has actually a sort of fetish for his hair, since he’s always touching it, obsessively.

They kiss, this time properly, for a while. When they part to take some air, Steve talks into his mouth. "Stay here tonight." Billy lifts his brows. "I don’t know if…" "Please. I want to sleep with you. I want to wake up with you next to me, having your smell all over the bed, making pancakes for you again." shit. How can you say no to a cute face like that? Billy sighs. "Fine." the other boy smirks and kisses his cheek in response. "But just because your pancakes are good shit." he spats then, clarifying his choice.

Billy is not sure if staying in Steve’s place could be a shitty idea. Sure, he has settled up the thing with his old-man, but still… that guy is kind of unpredictable. He could say nothing as much as he could beat the shit out of him with apparently no reason.

He can take the risk, after all. It’s worthy.

Notes for the Chapter:

Billy is bullied lol

17. I against I

Summary for the Chapter:

Family reunion

Notes for the Chapter:

A long one.

Sorry for the typos, as usual, I try my best I swear I do :) I hope you like it anyway.

I really enjoy writing this trash, it makes my mind flow away from a frustrating reality yaaay ^_^

Steve jumps off the bed when he hears the noise from downstairs. He reaches the bat under the bed and tightens the grip on the handle, ready to face the imminent danger. The sounds keep on, he can't really identify them, they seem clatters and bangs. Maybe a burglar?

He gives one last look at Billy. The boy is sleeping peacefully, totally undisturbed, an arm under the pillow and his belly pressed on the mattress, giving the view of the tanned, sculpted back.

Steve sighs and decides, for some reason, that he can deal with it all by himself. He slowly starts to go downstairs, while the noises become clearer and nearer. Then, the sudden sight of his mother makes him jump in surprise. She screams too, instinctively, moving a hand on her chest. Then, after having recognized themselves, they sigh, gaining breath after the fright.

"Steve, sweetheart… what are you doing with that thing?" she asks, gesturing towards him with a dramatic frown on her brows. Steve gasps and lowers the weapon, suddenly feeling infinitely idiot. "I thought you were burglars." his mother grips his arm. "Oh, sweetheart…" "Didn't know you two were back." Steve says, sounding not exactly pleased by the sudden return. Luckily, his mother doesn't seem bothered by that. "We have concluded our business sooner than what we expected. So, we're here for a week. I didn't want to tell you

that in order to make you a surprise. So, surprise!" yeah. Surprise.

Steve giggles nervously, rubbing the back of his neck. "Oh. Wow. It's amazing. Wow, totally thrilled." his mother doesn't perceive his tension and gives him a bone-crushing hug. "Oh sweetheart! It's so good to see you." yep. Because they're hardly at home like, ever. Steve is used to that, and it's ok. He can handle it, being on his own. He has learned how to manage it, so… having them, suddenly storming in the house, is giving him an odd sense of… nuisance? Sure, the house is theirs. However, they're never there.
"Yeah… let me wear something and I will be with you right away." Steve looks at his outfit, which consists exactly of just a pair of sweatpants. His mother nods and pats his cheek. "Of course, sweetie. Take your time."

He climbs the stairs almost in a run, storming into his room, slamming the door behind him. Then, he freezes: Billy is not there. For a moment, he thinks that maybe the guy has done a last-minute escape from the window, but then, he hears the sound of the shower running on. "Shit." he hisses between the teeth, bolting to the bathroom and entering in a rush.

"Manners, Harrington!" Billy yells in the shower, behind the curtains. "I could have been busy taking a dump, here. Learn how to knock."
"Shut up." Steve opens the curtains with a serious frown on his face. "My parents are here." he briefly explains, leaving Billy blinking in confusion, under the hot stream of the shower.
"Should I… leave from the window, or…?" Steve has thought about that solution, but truth is, he could never forgive himself if Billy ended up with a broken leg due to his own fault. So, he sighs in surrender. "No, no… don't worry about that. I will make up something. Just…" he hesitates, lifting a hand while he searches for the right words. "…Behave, ok?"

Billy rolls his eyes in irritation. "I'm not a fucking animal, Harrington. Besides, moms love me, remember?" Steve grunts. "This is exactly what I'm talking about. Don't fucking try to flirt with my mother. Understood?" he lifts an eyebrow and points a finger in what is supposed to be a severe expression, but Billy looks just amused by it. "Understood. Jeez, princess…" Steve ignores him and rudely pulls the curtains, leaving Billy without adding a thing. Damn, the sudden

apparition of his parents is freaking the hell out of him.
He puts on a plain shirt and goes downstairs, trying to make up a good story in his mind. Sure, there's nothing strange in having a friend over for the night. He and Tommy used to do that a lot, but having one who is taking a shower in his own bathroom on a midweek day, sure sounds suspicious. What can he say? Maybe that Billy has been kicked out? Nah, it would instantly throw bad vibes on Billy's persona… maybe that they had an assignment together and he had stayed because they lost track of the time and it was already too late? Goddammit that's stupid, he doesn't even go to school anymore!

His mind feels dizzy and overwhelmed when he enters the kitchen. His father is there, sitting at the big granite table, reading the newspaper, while his mother is fumbling on the stove, making pancakes with the special handed down Harrington's recipe.

His father gets on his feet and greets him politely, squeezing his shoulder without putting too much passion into the gesture. "Good morning, son." "Hey, dad"- Steve draws the fakest smile ever on his face. "…How are you? When did you get here?" "Late at night. The fly was postponed." "You can never trust those flying companies…" Steve's mom intrudes, turning slightly towards them.

Steve is standing in front of the table, like he's ready to bolts at any moment, when his father reaches back his seat, moving his sight to the paper again, evidently running out of his attention span for his son.

"Uhm… before you say anything, I got a friend who stayed here tonight." Steve hastily spats. "Oh! Is this friend a she that we should know or…?" his mother asks, all cheerful. "NO." he answers way too loud, then he clears his voice awkwardly. "He's… he's a friend." "Is he Tommy? Oh, that guy is such a sweetie. I heard from Stephanie that he got into college! Such a clever boy, I've always said that…" "He's not Tommy." Steve tells her, not able to keep back the venom in his voice. "He's a new friend." "Oh. How come he stayed over for the night on a midweek day?" his mother asks, while his father has been glaring at him with suspect all the time.

Steve shrugs casually. "His house has a… mold infestation so they're all staying out of it a few days while the specialist… disinfest it."

Mold infestation?! How can he be so stupid?! Steve wants to facepalms at himself for his own idiocy.

"So you collected the stray into your house?" his father spats, lowering his sight to his paper again. His mother burst into a fake laugh. "Henry! Oh, you know your father. Always joking around." Yeah. Always joking.

Steve sighs and finally decides to sit at the table. "What's his name?" his father questions, not moving the look from the newspaper. "Billy Hargrove." Steve tells him, almost in a whisper. Shit. he really hopes his father doesn't know him. That town is small and it's impossible not to acknowledge anyone, but he has never snitched on Billy when he had beat him, and he's still kind of new there, after all, so…

"Surname doesn't ring a bell." he spats, lifting an eyebrow. Steve rubs the back of his neck. "He's new in town… he moved here one year ago." "From where?" "San Diego. California." "Oh, lovely!" his mother chirps, while busy in the preparation of the pancakes.

"I love California! So sunny and warm there. You should come with us on our next trip there." Steve pinches the bridge of his nose, trying desperately not to get angry after so little time that he had seen his parents again.

"I can't. I got a job now, mom." "You mean the one at the video store?" Steve's dad doesn't put any effort into hiding his skepticism. As usual, when it comes to talking about his life, he's the one in the front line complaining about how a failure he is.

Before the conversation can turn any more awkward, Billy enters the kitchen, leaning promptly on the door jamb, hair still dump, a confident smile plastered on his face. Steve jumps on his feet and talks aloud, gesturing at him. "Oh, Billy! May I introduce you to my parents?" he's way too formal, but it's not that he can really hide how uncomfortable he really is, unlike Billy, who seems perfectly fitting in the contest. He shakes his father's hand, a virile 'real man' shake, and doesn't even flinch a little when his mother leans forward to give him the two "Italian kisses" on the cheeks.

"Lovely!" she exclaims, over-enthusiastic as usual. Damn, she and dad

are exactly the opposite person. Steve really can't understand how come they are together. "Have a seat, Billy! Join us for breakfast, I'm making Steve's favorite!" "Thank you, missis Harrington." he sits next to Steve, and if he's nervous, he's faking it pretty well. Steve's dad finally puts down the newspaper and starts to look at them with a pensive frown.

"Oh, don't you look like a Californian surfer? Ohh, so warm there, reminds me of Naples…" Steve's mom says, with a dreamy voice. Billy lets out a small laugh. "Never been in Naples, to be honest, but yeah, the weather is more merciful, I have to say. And yeah, I used to surf back in Cali." "You did?!" Steve snaps, surprised. That's cool! How many cool things he doesn't know about him?! Billy lifts an eyebrow. "Yeah. I did. Stevie." he answers, voice full of pungent irony.

Steve's dad suddenly passes a mug full of coffee to Billy with a sharp movement, making it crawl across the surface of the table. "Coffee." he just says, without any trace of gentleness. Billy makes a small, not very sincere, smile. "Thank you, Mr. Harrington."

Finally, Steve's mother serves pancakes for everyone and joins them. "Ohhh…. California! I remember the summers in Santa Cruz. The art fairs in San Francisco… there are a lot of great universities, there. Steve, sweetie, maybe you should try to apply for a college in California." at these words, Steve tightens the grip on his fork and grits his teeth. He's about to speak, when his father precedes him. "Steve is not interested in college, Anna. He's happy with his mediocre underpaid job at the Family Video." Billy almost chokes his mouthful, and Steve can't help but grin at the scene. Yup. His father is definitely an asshole, welcome to the club!

"Anyway" the patriarch resumes, eating all dignified his breakfast. "I noticed that someone was in our house, Steve, when I saw the blue Camaro parked in my parking yard." Billy flushes a little. "Sorry about that, Mr. Harrington, if I had known…" Steve's dad dismisses him with a wave of his hand. "Well, it's too late for that, isn't it? However, I have to say, that is a nice car. I appreciate that model, even if I'm loyal to BMW." Was that a compliment? Maybe it's the nearest one that Billy can receive from his father.

Billy makes a small laugh. "Thank you. Actually, it was scrap when I bought it, I had to do some reparations, some of them I managed on my own, saving some money." Steve's parents get tense and silent, chewing their food without saying a thing. Steve knows what they are doing, they are fucking judging him, inside their thick skulls. Billy doesn't seem to notice it.

"That's very… handy." Steve's mom comments, after an embarrassing amount of time. Steve just wishes he could bang his head on the table right now.
They manage to survive the breakfast with small, banal chatters. Then, Billy declares aloud how it's getting late and he had to drive back home to pick up his sister, making Steve's made-up story dramatically falling down.

Steve escorts him to the door, then, when the other boy is on the doorjamb, he whispers to him that he's sorry. But Billy completely ignores him and just smirks, pretending not to have heard anything.

"See you around, Steve." he greets him, leaving him dumbfounded on the doorjamb. That acting… was odd. Odd in a kind of way that Steve can't decipher, that leaves a heavy hole in his chest. Is he mad? Sure, his parents have been assholes with him, but he didn't look concerned about it at all.
When he gets back to the kitchen, his father is actually waiting for him to give him some kind of lecture. Steve tightens his fists in annoyance. He's not really in the mood for that.
"Steve, I don't think that boy is the right person who be friend with." he declares, solemn, because of fucking course he's back for less than an hour and he has already started to decide what's good for him.

Steve crosses his arm and stands promptly in front of him, glaring at him with a challenging look. "Why do you think that, dad? You barely know him." "But I know the type. He's not good for you. I'm trying to look after you, son." yeah, of course he is. What a generous man! Steve looks questioningly at his mom, who's completely ignoring them, busy washing the dishes. As usual, the final decision is up to the patriarch. She has no say in the matter.

"You need to learn who is the best people who hang out with, Steve. And that boy… those people, they stick to you like leeches, if you let

them do it."
Of course it's a matter of money, like everything else in the world. Just because Billy comes from a family that is not loaded like his, he must be some sort of beggar. Steve grits his teeth and pinches the bridge of his nose, unable to hold back his irritation anymore.

"I invited him over. He didn't ask for anything, dad. And, actually, he helped me. He helped me a lot, because I was depressed, I was feeling like shit, and you weren't here!" he says the last words aloud, almost yelling, and it's strange, because he never gets angry, he accumulates and accumulates until he's ready to burst.

"I know that we weren't here for you." the dad sighs. "But we're doing this for you, to create a future for this family." "BULLSHITS!" Steve shouts back, surprising even himself for his own raising rage. "You do this life because you like to! There are certain people that live for money, career, success, and, guess what, I'm not one of them!" he has now gone too far and he can't get back anymore. So he can only go with the flow. "I'm not like you! There's more out there than money! You can't think you'll buy your own happiness with it. And I'm fucking tired to hear you say what's the best for me! You don't know me, dad. But he…" he gestures towards outside, referring implicitly to Billy. "…he does. And he also knows what's good for me. So, next time you decide to judge a person without even know them, try to think a little more about your own, dirty conscience."

And that's it. Steve leaves his father gasping in confusion and storms out of the room. He knew he has gone too far, but he doesn't care. He has really reached his limit of endurance. He hears his father calls him from the kitchen, but no way he's turning back. No, from now on, he has decided to start to enjoy living his life under his condition. Family Video? Yeah, maybe a shitty, underpaid job, but at least he has chosen it, he has found it on his own. Billy Hargrove? Yeah, maybe a difficult boyfriend, but he has been definitely the best choice that he had made in recent times.

So, screw them, as Billy would say.

Billy tightens the grip on the steering wheel, holding back the tears in his eyes while driving ragingly through the empty streets of Hawkins.

That has been beyond humiliating, playing the dumb card with Steve's parents, pretending to not hear their snarky comments, their judging glances on him.
Billy knows those kinds of people. He has been interacting with them for all his life. Rich, smug assholes that shoot sentences just because they're wealthy, as if it was enough to give the right to treat the other half like pieces of garbage.

Steve is not like them. Steve is surely not like them. But still… they're still his parents, and they sure have some kind of influence on him. Nathan was quite the opposite of his father, but he was completely under his thumb in the end. What if Steve is the same? He can't really afford to repeat that shitty story again, no. It has been difficult enough just to tell it to Steve, yesterday…

Since he got there in that shithole in bumfuck Indiana, he has forcedly avoided thinking about the events that had caused their transfer, deciding to get over it once for all. Of course, it hadn't been really effective. He has told himself that he would have never made the same mistakes again. He would have behaved, this time, avoiding at all cost the real source of his issues: his sexual orientation.

At the time, Nathan had been the first and the last boy in his life, but their turbulent relationship has made him understand a few things about him, and one of them is that he actually doesn't like girls. He has been with girls before him, but it was always pretending, he was just acting the part that he should have done. So, after all the shit finished, he had said to himself that he would have been back to act again, to at least try to disguise himself as the straightest guy on earth.

But it hadn't been after long that the first troubles had made their appearance. Precisely, it was a shitty, lame party in some chick's house. Billy had already overtaken the social hierarchy, beating some stupid keg record and showing himself as the alpha lion of the pack. He hadn't found any kind of resistance, by no one. It had been so boring, but still, what could he expect? Then, he had seen him. Since he got there in that shithole he had heard about the infamous Steve Harrington, once King of the school, now lapsed for some chick.

The first time Billy has seen him, a chill of excitement had

overwhelmed his spine. His body has reacted by himself, while he had felt the urge of smashing away the smug, annoyed grimace of that fucking preppy king. He had looked bored, totally unimpressed. So, Billy's mind had started to react by consequence. He needed to be noticed by him. He had the impossible, unstoppable urge to be seen, to be looked at by the boy.

So, he had glared at Harrington, bulking up with clenched jaws all in his alpha attitude, challenging Steve, making himself bigger and more important, while his mind could only think: *fuck, here I go again.*

In the following months, Steve has been his stinging, growing obsession: he couldn't fucking stop to think about the guy's scent, about his smooth hair, about his eyes. He couldn't stop wondering how his lips would have tasted, how the sensation of his hair between his fingers would have been. But he could only transform the physical contact of those drives into violent shoves in the court, virile pats on the shoulder and pushes through the corridors. Billy couldn't help it, and honestly, didn't want it either. He just wanted Steve's attention, an impossible acknowledgement. In that school, in that fucking shithole, Steve was the only one who didn't show any sign of impression on him.
Then, the infamous night arrived. Steve has noticed him, has looked at him, but with disgust and repulsion.

Billy had behaved later on. Had avoided Steve, exactly as Max as ordered to him. And he had managed even to achieve some sort of fucked up equilibrium, between the parties with that crowd of yokels, the dates with the cows and the job at the pool. He had managed to get Steve Harrington out of his mind, to get Nathan out of his mind. To get the boys, in general, out of his mind.

But, of course, Steve had to be the one involved in all that shit with the Mind-Flayer. Had to be the one at the Byers house, the one that had started to look after him without getting asked, the one that has shown how much he cared about him, making him forget himself, for a brief, sweet, moment.

He quickly parks the Camaro in front of his place and jumps off, a cloud of bad mood almost visible on his head.

He finds everyone in the kitchen, eating breakfast at the table. They give him a curious glance, Neil lifting his sight from the newspaper.

"Good morning, everyone." Billy politely says, leaning on the doorjamb, trying really hard not to show how actually pissed he is. Neil glares at him. "Where have you been?"
"Robin. Sorry if I didn't call you, sir. We've lost the track of time and it was a little bit late yesterday. I came here to pick up Max."
Max turns towards him, mouth half-full of her toast. Neil stays silent for a while, as if he's trying to decide if he will be mad or not. In the end, he looks defeated. Well, he had fulfilled his responsibilities, after all, coming there, just for Max.

"Very well." he says, in the end. "Did you have breakfast?"
Billy blinks and widens his eyes in response. It's not that his father has ever cared about him having breakfast. What? Is worrying about his own son being fashionable on the people of his kind? Because sure it has never happened before. What? Now he acknowledges his existence just because he thinks he's fucking some chick? That's pathetic.
"I did. Thank you, sir." he answers, flat voice, while he's internally screaming. For some reason, his father making those strange 'fatherly' questions makes him hate him even more, if possible.

He looks at Max, who has now finished her toast. He asks her if she's ready, putting all his efforts into sounding polite and kind.
Once in the car, the little bitch doesn't miss the chance to annoy him.

"Were you at Steve's?" she asks casually, pressing her head on the window, looking at the trees absently. "None of ya." Billy tells back, changing completely his attitude from the 'in-front-of-Neil' Billy to the 'usual asshole' one. Max grimaces, but doesn't look offended, probably too used to her stepbrother's manners.
She starts to stare at him. And, damn, that's pretty fucking rude, not to say annoying. "What?!" Billy hisses, sucking a long drag of smoke into his lungs, eyes fixed on the road. She continues to do that, the troublesome staring.

"You look odd. What crawled up your ass and died?" Billy groans, tightening the grip on the steering wheel and speeding up in irritation. "Just you, Maxine. You and your fucking questions. Is it too

much to ask you just to shut up once in your life?" she gasps, this time looking hurt. "Why are you like this all of a sudden?!" "Because, I am like this. Stick it in that little head of yours. We're not friends, Maxine, and we'll never be. You have no right to snoop into my business, over."

At these words, Max goes silent, turning her head on the opposite side of him to hide her tears. When they arrive at the parking lot of the school, she grabs her skate, opens the side door of the car and yells at him just before jumping off the Camaro.

"You haven't changed. I hate you!"

She slams the door behind her and starts to skate to school. Billy sighs, sliding a hand through his curls in exhaustion. He really doesn't have the time to deal with this shit now.
He manages to spend all day in solitude, avoiding Robin at any cost, even eating lunch alone in his car. He can't fucking interact with any other human being in those conditions. He's afraid that he could do something that he would regret soon. It's like before again, his senses are overstimulated, his knuckles ready to burst, itching for a fight.
Steve has said that there was two Billy. The one that has beaten him and the one that was starting to learn how to trust people and create boundaries. What if there were never a second Billy? What if Max is right, and he has never changed at all? What if it has been all just another stupid illusion?

Has he stopped believing in fairytales?

That infinite shitty day has almost reached its end.

Billy is continuously looking at his wristwatch at the workshop, waiting feverishly for 6:30 to come, so he can finally fuck off, get home and crawl into his bed.
It's 6:10, so that moment should arrive shortly. Even thou, it looks like it's 6:10 for half an hour. Time passes incredibly slow when you're a depressed wreck.
Frank tells him to change the tires of a pick-up and he responds with a noncommittal hum. Today he has rarely spoken. Frank is clever enough to mind his own business and avoid asking what his deal is,

as long as he keeps doing the job without giving any problem.

He has just finished the task when he hears footsteps behind his back. He does not deign to turn around to face the customer, too busy organizing some tools on the shelves. He speaks with a flat voice.

"Hope it’s a quick thing. We’re about to close." "Oh, it won’t take long, no." he snaps at the known voice, brows frowning in surprise.
Henry Harrington stands promptly with his hands hooked in the pocket of his trench coat; a humorless expression plastered on his face. Billy gains composure and sighs. Yeah, There’s nothing to be surprised of, after all. He could have expected it. Now this rich asshole will give him 'the speech', maybe adding a threat underline.

"Mr. Harrington, good evening. What can I do for you?" Billy speaks politely and cold, keeping eye-contact with the tall man, like he’s under some sort of challenge. "Just a word." the man says, face motionless like a stone.

Frank appears from the cabin and greets him with excessive enthusiasm. Yeah. Of course this man is beloved and feared by every soul of that shithole town. With power comes respect.

"Can I steal your boy for a minute, Frank?" Mr. Harrington asks, in a tone that doesn’t leave space for objections. Frank sends just a quick, almost worried glare to Billy, probably asking himself if he’s in trouble or something, but then he obviously agrees.

"Sure. Billy, you’re dismissed early, today. I can clean up the workshop myself."

At these words, Billy just takes his stuff in peaceful surrender and goes out of the workshop silently followed by Steve’s old-man. The breeze outside pleasantly chills his skin, giving him a brief but enjoyable relief. It’s like a furnace inside that fucking workshop and he probably smells sweat, but it’s not that he can give a flying fuck. Mr. Harrington better to fuck off.

He looks at the man, arm crossed, a brow lifted slightly, waiting for him to talk. He doesn’t even want to try to fake friendliness with that man, he doesn’t feel like it and, however, it looks like they both want

to go straight to the point.

"I will be clear, Billy." Mr. Harrington announce, resolute. "I don't want you to be friend with my son."

Billy represses the urge to laugh. Yeah, of course he doesn't. He's a bad company for Steve. Was he a bad company also when he had Steve's cock down to his throat, the previous week? When he had Steve's spunk on his knuckles, a few days before?

He scratches his chin in total nonchalance. Then, he just nods. "Uhm. Is that all?" Mr. Harrington tenses a little in response. "I'm serious. You stay away from Steve. He's not capable of making good choices, and as his father, I need to address him in better frequentations and life decisions. You may think that he's a fool who you can make fun of, but it's not. Not with me in the house. There won't be space for strays anymore."

Strays. Steve's dad has used the same word that morning too. So, is that his idea? That Billy is some sort of homeless poor that is taking advantage of Steve's ingenuity? Well, at least he isn't suspecting about his son being a fag. Or maybe that asshole has not even the courage to admit that thought to himself, which is very likely.

Billy doesn't react at all. He stares right into the deep, black eyes of the other man with a poker face. There are few empty seconds of silence, then, the man speaks again. "I made some questions about your family around and, guess what? I find the circumstances of your sudden moving here in Hawkins very weird. I have purposely decided not to deepen my research, but you need to know that it is very easy for me to go back to any kind of sensitive information. As you can see, it has been very easy to find your workplace, also."
So, is that the threatening part? Yup. Totally predictable. This man is such a cliché.

Billy sighs again, tired and annoyed. "Ok." he spats. "Ok?" "Ok. You win, Mr. Harrington. I will leave your son alone. I already had this intention, to be honest. You won't hear from me anymore, never again. Can I go home now?"

Mr. Harrington scrutinizes Billy in evident suspect. He doesn't believe

him, clearly, but it’s not that Billy can do something about it. Whatever thing he says, whatever thing he does, it’s wrong. It won’t ever be right. He knows too much the situation, doesn’t he?

"Very well. I hope you’ll do what you told me. Be reasonable, there’s nothing you can do. Have a nice evening, Billy." Mr. Harrington spats venomously. "Yeah, have a nice one." Billy gives him a last, long glare, then, he rushes to his car and slams the door.

He waits for the other to disappear into his big BMW, then, he finally starts to throw punches to the steering wheel and curses between his teeth, letting out the too long repressed boiling rage.

"Fuck, fuck, FUCK! Fucking fucker!"

He presses his front to the steering wheel and tightens his grip, gritting his teeth. A knock on the window makes him flinch. He snaps towards the source, finding Frank looking at him with an odd empathetic gaze on his face.

"You ok there, buddy?"

He hastily lowers the window and talks to the man with a hoarse voice. "It’s ok, Frank. Just a bad day." "Oh, well, you know everyone has down moments. If you want to…" "It’s ok. See you next week." Before the man can add anything else, he starts the engine and rushes away with a screech of his tires. No, he won’t talk to him, he won’t talk to anybody.

That’s exactly the last thing he wants to do now. In fact, he just needs a safe place where to isolate and melt in his own pain, far away from any human being, if possible.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Steve's parents exist, unfortunately.
>
> I don't know why there are so many fics where Steve's mom is Italian, but, anyway, I love it so I borrowed it :)
> I used a lot of cliches to be honest, it's just that I think they work pretty good and are very effective.

Thnx for reading and keep holding on!

18. Weight of love

Summary for the Chapter:

Doubts, chitchats, resolutions.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello! I've been doing a lot of editing...

I also changed the rating because I was thinking that maybe things got too... heated up? Mh, dunno.

“This has never happened before.”

“Ok, dingus, you’ve already said that. But hasn’t crossed in your mind that maybe, I say maybe, he just wants some space?”
Him, some space? That’s ridiculous.

“I mean, you’ve been almost glued together since the beginning of your… sort of relationship.” Robin continues, practical. “It’s not ‘sort of’, Rob. We’re together. See, we’ve expressively told ourselves that we’re boyfriends.” Steve objects. “Yeah, but… my idea is still the same. Maybe he just needs some space for himself. Not a big deal.”

It wouldn’t be a big deal if Billy had verbally expressed so to him but, he didn’t. In fact, the last time they’ve seen each other has been the infamous morning at his place, where his parents have decided to suddenly storm back into his life after months of disappearance. It was a couple of days before, then, nada. Billy has been ghosting him for more than 48 hours and Steve is literally burning out due to that. Last time they have saluted themselves bad. Steve feels a heavy tight of guilt and sorrow, thinking about Billy’s polite greet on his home’s threshold. That was… so cold and detached. And he knows, he fucking knows that something is off. His parents have been dickheads to him, and maybe, even if he didn’t show any sign of concern, he’s somehow mad at Steve.

The doubt and the waiting are killing him slowly from the inside.
He grunts and sighs, while he and Robin are busy with the last

cleaning up before the closure of the store. Those two days have been hellish. Working with fewer hours with Robin is bad enough, adding the mysterious absence of Billy and the climate of absolute tension with his parents in his home is making Steve's great ruin.

"You said that he's kind of avoiding you at school." Steve points out while mopping the floor. She shrugs casually in response. "Yeah, but, as I said, maybe he's just… thinking. Figuring out things. It's normal, people do that a lot." Steve scoffs. "Billy? *Thinking*?" he asks, as if the hypothesis is pure comedy. She rolls her eyes. "Hey, it's your boyfriend, Stevie. Not mine. Well, technically speaking, he's also mine, but… if this is freaking out that much, why don't you just sort it out?"

How? This is the fucking problem. Billy is unreachable. He had already tried to contact him with the receiver through Max, just to receive a harsh and pissed off 'he's not here, sorry' by the red-head. Sure, he can make another try, and he surely is going to do that the same evening, but, apart from so, he's completely out of solutions. Unless… he can always try to sneak into the boy's room in the night. He's used doing that kind of stuff, he used to do that a lot with Nancy. Sure, Nancy didn't have a psycho dad with violent outbursts, but still. That could be an idea.

He's going to do it the same evening. He can't wait any more. He desperately needs to solve the Billy issue, otherwise, he will implode in anxiety.

Two knocks on the door. Of course, asking for some fucking privacy and peace is always too much in that hateful house of his.

"What?!" he barks above the music, lifting his chin from his book. He hopes that is not his father, otherwise his insolence won't stay unpunished. He shouldn't be at home, but he hasn't got out of his room for hours, so he can't be so sure. Luckily, it's just Max. She yells behind the door, not caring to hide her huge annoyance.

"Billy, open up!"
He groans and throws rudely the book on his bed. Then, he rushes to the door and opens it just a few inches.

“What?” he hisses, glaring daggers to his stepsister who is doing pretty much the same over the threshold of the door. “Steve wants to talk to you.” she spats. She’s still pissed for their fight in the car, outside the school. Those days have been pretty much like their past relationship. The driving has been again silent and full of reciprocal hate, she has started again to slam the door while she gets off the Camaro and giving him the middle finger while she thinks he can’t see her. Such a brat.

They’re on the foot of war again, but Billy can’t give a shit about that. He’s so angry, so fucking angry with anyone, everything, that he has no space for guilt or sorrow left.
“You can tell him to fuck off.” he grunts. He’s about to close the door when Max puts a foot on the space between it and the doorjamb. “So this is why you’re an asshole again? You guys have argued or something?” she questions, raising a brow in suspicion. “You can fuck off too.” Billy hisses. She just groans and rolls her eyes, but finally disappears, leaving him alone again in his shitty mood and isolation.

He resumes his reading, a shitty book for a shitty assignment of that shitty school of that shithole town. He grips the book in pure wrath, clenching the pages like a maniac while Metallica is blasting from his radio.

Max. Such a little shit. She can never mind her own business, can she? Always babbling, sticking her nose where she must not. Like all the other people in that fucking town, everyone knows everyone else’s business, everyone is a fucking nosy talker. Maybe this is why Max loves it so much, isn’t it? She’s perfect for that crowd of pathetic idiots.

He continues the spiraling of hate thoughts in his mind, finding it impossible to focus on the reading, while a knock catches his attention, this time it comes from the window. He snaps towards the source of the sound and finds a human figure behind the glass. His first reaction is to flinch, alarmed, but he doesn’t scream or something because, well, he’s not a fucking pussy. Then, he focuses better on the person, recognizing none less than Steve.

The fucking idiot. He would be touched if he weren’t so fucking angry with the world. He opens the window and glares at him coldly.

“The fuck are you doing here, Harrington?” he spats, emotionless. “Hey…” …but the puppy eyes of the brunette instantly make something move inside him, and his anger seems to evaporate a little.

“You shouldn’t be here. This is serious shit…” Billy exhales, voice softening a little. “You’re avoiding me.” Steve sounds hurt and, honestly, Billy’s rage is turning more and more into something else. “I’m not.” he replies, crossing his arm. “You are. I want to know why.” Steve looks straight into his eyes, determined, firm. God, a glance is sufficient to make Billy feeling like pure shit as well as overly dramatic. Two days. He has been ghosting him for two days, but now it feels like an eternity.

“Can I come in?” Steve asks, uncertain. Billy sighs again and nods, taking a step back and leaving some space for the other boy. Steve climbs into his room. This is officially the first time that the boy has stepped inside it, but he doesn’t look slightly interested in it at all. His eyes are glued to Billy, as if he’s scared that the boy could escape from him another time.

“Something is bothering you. Please, talk to me.” Steve declares, heavily serious, approaching Billy until their faces are barely a few inches distant. Jeez. Two days and Billy finds himself thinking again how beautiful the boy is, like the first time he has seen him. Steve has his brows furrowed and his jaw clenched, in a firm concentrated expression. Billy can’t do that. He moves his eyes to the floor, as he tries to speak but suddenly freezes in hesitation.

“I…” he just stutters, like an idiot, cursing himself into his mind, thinking about how pussy he can be when it comes to face Steve Harrington in that kind of situation. He feels so dumb.
“Billy…” Steve caresses his cheek and his eyes soften a little. “It’s ok. Just tell me what is it, ok? Use your voice, baby.”

Shit. Shit. Shit!

Billy bits his lower lip and puts all his effort into avoiding eye contact with Steve. The effect that he does on him… it’s just overwhelming. It’s a storm that leaves his mind blurry, blank and messy.
Get your fucking shit together! He thinks, snapping back to reality. “Nothing at all, princess. I’m just leaving you to your family bonding

moments." Steve gives him a confused look. "What…? You know that I'm not exactly a big fan of my parents, don't you?" he does. They have talked about that.

Billy smirks maliciously. "Well, they aren't big fans of me either, aren't they?" Steve gasps, upset. "Is that what this is about?! Billy, baby… I'm sorry that they have been assholes to you, ok? But you know what I think about them! They're not like me. I'm not like them!"

Billy knows. But still… Nathan was the exact opposite of his father too, but in the end, he has been too frightened by his old-man to follow his own will. Strong people, rich people… they have all the sorts of resources.

"Your father doesn't want you to hang out with me." Billy states gravely. Steve blinks. Then, he just makes a small shrug. "Yeah. So what?" "So what?" Billy repeats. "Yeah. Who cares? Screw them, right?" Steve sounds so sure and so uncharacteristically calm about that… he sighs, running a hand through his perfect hair. "Listen, they don't like you, ok, that sucks, but they don't like me either. And, in case you didn't notice, I'm not exactly keen on following their life advice, am I?" Billy just shakes his head in response. "Right. So, what if they don't want me to hang out with you? Who gives a shit? We will do that anyway, secretly. Since when do you care about rules or breaking prohibitions…? Screw them, right?"

Billy stays silent, while he's starting to feel complete, utterly stupid. He has really overthought it; he has practically created a problem where it didn't even exist at all.
Steve is scrutinizing him as if he's trying to solve a complex equation. "This isn't about my dad, is it?" he asks, perceptive. "This is about… what happened in Cali, with your ex, right? What you told me." yup. Fucking bingo.

Billy sighs and runs his hands to his face in exhaustion. "I'm sorry. I'm such an idiot sometimes." Steve laughs, making him blush spontaneously in response, and entangles his arms to his waist.

"Fancy hearing that from you, big boy. But if you don't mind, I'd like to hear other things from your pretty mouth." Steve speaks a few

inches from him, making their foreheads collide. Billy smiles and throws his arm on his shoulders. “Yeah? Tell me about it.” he whispers. Steve starts to kiss his chin, slowly, carefully. He talks with a dreamy voice, cracked by arousal. “For example… I’d like to hear my name from your mouth, over and over.” his breath on his neck gives him a pleasant chill into his spine. “I’d like to hear your plea… to hear you beg me.” he’s kissing and biting the soft skin of his jugular, while the air has become already dense of electricity. There’s no more space for the worries, the intrusive thoughts that have overwhelmed them in those recent days.

Billy manages to make a small laugh. “You sound sure about that, Harrington.” he teases, because, damn, how can that guy turn from a goofy dork to some sort of goody sex animal in so little? Sure Steve has a multifaceted personality. “You want me to beg you? Is that one of your little fantasies?” Steve chuckles on his shoulder blade. “Yeah, it is.” he admits with disarming honesty, alternating kisses and small bites all over his skin.

Steve moves to his chest and starts to unbutton his shirt, leaving a trail of kisses among the way. Billy tilts his head back in pleasure and exhales languidly. “You want me to beg you…” he sighs. Steve nods and smirks on his abs.

“You want me to beg you… to fuck me.”

Steve instantly stops and lifts his gaze on him, surprised by the swagger of those words. Billy smirks, satisfied, and pats the other boy’s hair. Steve gains back composure and starts again with the kisses, moving slowly downward.

“Shit… I want that.” he hisses on Billy’s groin, while starting to unfasten his belt. “I want you… so much, baby.” he moves his mouth on his cock, still trapped under the underwear that, strangely enough, today Billy has decided to wear. But Steve is too focused on his task to decide to put attention to it.

Steve is kissing his length through the fabric, and Billy finds himself panting under that blissful treatment. “I want you so much… I can’t stop thinking about you. You’re driving me insane, baby…” Steve whispers, grabbing his waistband. He’s about to pull it down, he’s

about to free his unbearable too hard cock, when the sound of a car door closing reports him to reality, interrupting that way too pleasant dream.

Billy curses in his teeth and hastily starts to button himself. “Shit! You need to get out of here. Now.” Steve gives him a confused look, still kneeling on the floor.
“Steve, I’m serious… you can’t be here. Listen to me… please.”

For a moment, Steve just gasps like a fish, speechless. Then, a red tint appears in his cheeks, and it’s actually adorable, if it weren’t a fucking urgent situation that needs to be solved.
“O… ok. I’m sorry.” Steve stutters, making Billy’s heart almost melting because goddam, that idiot will give him caries for how sweet he can be. He lowers down, grabs the brunette’s chin, and presses a quick chaste kiss on his lips.
“We’ll continue this discussion, eventually. But now it’s better for you to go.”

He hears the sound of the entrance door. Shit. No good. No fucking good.
Finally, Steve snaps from his reverie and jumps to his feet, decided to go. They eventually share another quick kiss on the threshold of the window, before Steve jumps into the bushes.

Billy stands there, looking at the window like an idiot, a smile plastered on his face. Damn. That guy will be seriously his ruin. He has been so stupid, so fucking stupid, spending two days long just slacking off due to his paranoia, when he should have just talked to him and sort things out. He always must do that, makes things difficult, more difficult than how they are. But maybe he can change that. He’s already making so many changes for Steve that he barely recognizes himself anymore. It’s strange, how those shifts aren’t forced in any way, it comes so naturally, to become a better human being for him. It’s like he’s giving him a real reason to improve himself. And he wants to continue to do that. Fuck, if he wants. He likes how his life is turning out, the new (and old) people that he has allowed in.

He’s awakened from a loud knock on the door. He shakes his head, snapping out of his thoughts. He needs to get back to be presentable

now.
He opens the door, finding Neil glaring at him with his usual severe expression. “Good evening, sir.” he politely salutes. Neil just grunts, and then checks Billy’s room with his sight. “I heard a noise.” he spats. Billy shrugs casually, holding back the faint of a sly smirk. “I was working out.”

It’s not a long fall, since Billy’s home is just on one floor. But his window is still a couple of meters high, from where he lands on a spiky bush with a thud.

He groans something between his teeth, imagining how he will find himself full of bruises the day after, when he notices a human figure a few meters away. The figure looks at him with furrowed brows and a grimace and exclaims low voice. “Steve?!”
What the hell? Is that the ‘sneaking in from the window evening meeting’?

“Lucas?!” “What are you doing here?!” the kid asks, shocked. Steve shrugs, still painfully stuck in the branches. At least that unpleasant fell from the window has instantly cured the raging erection in his pants. “Pretty much the same thing as you, man.” he briefly explains. Then, he throws a glare at the boy that sure is impossible to be seen in the dark, but that is still there. “You tell something, and your ass is grass, Sinclair.” Lucas scoffs, cocky. “Same as you, Steve.”

He represses an annoyed grunt. Since when the kids are becoming more and more arrogant?! Ah, new generations.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Eheh... we all know Billy's "workout".
>
> Thank you for the lovely kudos, leave a feedback if you want, that would be very helpful!

19. Here comes the rain again

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hullo!
>
> Important update: there is an improved wip version of this fic, beta-read and partially rewrite by Lumina_Solaris!
>
> You can read it here . An amazing job has been done!

Billy falls deadweight on his bed, looking at the ceiling with a dreamy, idiotic smile plastered on his face.

He can still feel the touch of Steve's soft lips all over his torso, on his chest, on his neck. That scene with him… hearing him saying out aloud those filthy things, seeing him so turned on and full of desire… that was something else. Steve wants to fuck him, so bad. And it's a very delight that Billy wants exactly the same. He has been wanting it for a while, craving it, fantasizing about it.

He lazily reaches a hand over the waistband of his underwear, closing his eyes and exhaling a long breath. Steve in his fantasy is powerful enough, but Steve in reality… simply beyond. He finds himself rubbing languidly his cock through the fabric while he mentally chases the sensations of Steve's touch still fresh on his body. Yep. He's definitely going to jerk off, maybe fucking himself by adding a couple of slick fingers into his hole, desperately imagining Steve in the act of doing that.

So, he opens his eyes, intentioned to reach the lube in the last drawer of the bedside table, but he instantly realizes that something is off. Like, very off. He's not in his room anymore. He's still on his bed but surrounded by darkness and cosmic emptiness. A little kid is standing next to him, staring at him with her big, brown doe eyes, face blank and motionless.

"Hi, Billy."
"WHAT THE FUCK-"

He jumps on his spot, making the bed creak, while a sudden embarrassingly strong wave of heat hits his face.

“What were you doing?” El asks, atone, lifting slightly a brow in vague interest. Ok, either she’s some kind of retarded or she’s just taking the piss. Billy can’t tell, maybe the little girl is really, really naive as she appears. He sighs, facepalming in surrender, and lays his head on the pillow. At least she didn’t catch him with his cock on his hand or worse, his fingers into his asshole. That would have been way more difficult to explain.

“Jesus, kiddo! You can’t just sneak in my mind, you…” he groans, annoyed and defeated. El hasn’t stopped staring at him, even though she doesn’t look particularly concerned. She speaks slowly and calmly. “You’re all red. You got fever?” at this ridiculous question, Billy grunts and grabs the pillow next to him, putting it on his face to cover the mess or maybe, why not, choke himself to death and get away from that situation.

“The fuck you want?!” he asks, rudely, voice muffled by the pillow that he’s still clenching in an iron grip.
“Come to say hello.”

Hello. *Hello*?! Fucking hello.

“…And to ask you to come to my house tomorrow.” she continues. Billy throws away the pillow and squints at her. “What? You’re gonna do a tea party or something? Are we going to braid our hair and tell us our little secrets?” he spats, venomous. He’s being a little bit of an asshole, but he’s still too pissed about El’s intrusion in his mind, especially when he was about to release some tension like a good hormonal 18-years-old teenager normally does. El, however, doesn’t show any sign of annoyance at his bad manners.

“You need practice.” she simply claims and, well, Billy doesn’t need any further explanations at that. He knows that she’s talking about his absolutely not-wanted freaky ‘Mind-Flayer superpower’.

He scoffs, sour. “Ironic. Last time didn’t go well, if I recall correctly. What? Have you some sort of death wish? You want me to become the villain of this nuts story of yours?!” “Billy.” El makes a step

ahead, her eyes glued on him with a serious, heavy gaze. Jesus, that kid is creepy. Sometimes, with gazes like that, she doesn't even look like a kid. Doesn't look like a grown adult either. Something in between, maybe? Like a creature that exists out of age?

"It's going to be ok. I promise you." she reassures. A foreign sensation catches Billy's attention. He lowers his sight, to discover that El is holding his hand, and, strange enough, even in that 'other dimension', it does feel real. He swallows, suddenly feeling emptied of his irritation towards the girl, and lifts his chin to look at her, not able to hide the evident discomfort on his face.

"Last time didn't go ok. El, it's dangerous. You might be in danger." he sighs, running a hand through his hair. El smiles and tightens the grip on his hand. "We will not use Steve, or humans. We will do something else." Billy can't avoid looking confused at these words, but the kid just has to be all mysterious about it, like a goddamn Yoda Jedi master or something. She retrieves her hand, interrupting the touch, and makes a step back, never stopping to smile in that kind of 'reassuring' way.

Billy sighs. Well, it's not that he has many choices, after all. "Fine." he exhales, in the end. El looks genuinely pleased with this. "Ok. Thank you, Billy." thank you, she says…
"Max says that you are an asshole. Don't be an asshole, Billy." she then states out of nothing. What is that for?! He groans, annoyed. "Max can go fuck herself."
Then, a sudden thought snaps into his brain. He rises in a sitting position, interjecting El before she disappears and leaves him alone in the void.

"El… could you just… not tell Max about this?" he vaguely gestures at himself, causing the evident lack of understanding in the girl. Damn, is she fucking with him or what?! Did she really not notice that he was clearly about to jerk off?!

It's not that he cares if Max knows, no no. He has already traumatized her with various past episodes. But still…
"Never mind." he just spats, deciding to drop off the topic. If the kid is really that pure, he's not the right person to explain to her what a guy can do alone in his room.

The scene is quite odd, not upside-down odd, but still. To be honest, it's not even the first time that Will 'the wise' is giving them a speech about his theories on the 'Flayer-power' situation, but this time the kid even armed himself with a board and papers where he's writing and drawing while explaining his newfound suppositions.
Steve is awkwardly scratching his chin, sitting leg crossed on the coach. He's looking in Will's direction, but really he's not giving him any attention, too focused on his thoughts, which are pretty much more trivial than the general topics that are running in that room.

So, Will… Will is gay. And he's just thirteen-years-old! How could he understand that so easily? How could he, Steve, understand his being bisexual so late?! Has he always been like that or he has become it gradually? Jesus. He may have thought about a few nice-looking actors a few times in the past, but that was innocent and casual, wasn't it?
How about Billy? When did he understand that? How come? Was it with his ex, what name was that…? Nathan?

Jesus. Here's another big black well of paranoia. Fucking Nathan. Steve hasn't stopped to maniacally wondering how the guy could have been. He has been Billy's first love, after all. The real important question is… did they fuck?! Because Steve has made clear how much he wants to do that, and Billy has made clear how happily he would let him. But, jerking or sucking off a guy is a thing, fucking, actually *fucking* him… sounds like a totally different level of being a pro.

What if he'll suck at that?! It's better that Billy has no comparison, but sure he's not a freaking virgin… he's Billy Hargrove, for god's sake, he practically glows sexual pheromones all the time! Steve is going to fail miserably. He's going to make a fool of himself…

He's now staring into the void, playing with his lip with his index, absent-mindedly, when he finally notices Will speaking at him. He snaps, clearly caught by surprise, and asks the kid to repeat the question.

"What do you think about it…?" Will asks, a lifted brow. Steve shrugs in response. "Yeah, yeah, sounds great." he mumbles, while he can

practically feel Billy's amused gaze on him. "Great?!" Mike spats, sounding almost pissed off.

"Yeah, yeah, I mean, it's great. A great idea. Very articulate." Steve stutters, evidently unable to stop continuing to dig his own hole. Everybody's eyes are pointed at him, all skeptical and perplexed. Billy grins wolfishly at his right, shifting on his spot to be more comfortable on the couch.

"Oh, don't mind him. He's been zoning out since the beginning of this funny little chit-chat meeting of yours." "Oh, fuck off!" Steve barks back, pretending to be outraged by that clearly unfounded accusation. "No, seriously, Steve." Billy leans forward, going dangerously close to him, never stopping to grin all teeth. "What's on your mind? Must be very endearing, if I dare to ask." Steve glares at him. If he only knew…

"Guys!" Lucas captures their attention, impatient. "Focus!" he yells that snapping a finger in Steve's face, making him groan in annoyance.

"I will recap for Steve's distraction." Will solemnly announces, rolling his eyes. Steve gulps, crossing his arms on his chest and moving his sight to the kid. Yeah. Ok. He can do that. He can be concentrated. He just needs to stop thinking about an other dude's cock in Billy's ass… oh god, here we go again… it's not that having the guy seated next to him is exactly helping!

"This must be a Mind-Flayer's new form. It's like Billy has earned it, the power to control other livings' minds, but, in the meanwhile, the Mind-Flyer is still there. Sleeping, in a dormant form, somewhere inside him." Will explains and… yeah, that actually makes sense. Steve watches absently Billy next to him, who's strangely attentive. Then, he shifts his gaze on Will again.

"If Billy doesn't learn how to control it, the dormant Mind-Flayer could wake up again, as it has already happened a couple of weeks ago. It's like… like a virus. You get rid of it, but it continues to live in your body and can be back when you least expect it."

"Like herpes." Steve needs to point, making Dustin facepalm in

response. Will makes a small, shy smile. “Yeah… kind of.” “So what? I got herpes, now?! It means that I could wake up a day without being me anymore, again?!” Billy hisses, brows furrowed. Will gasps, slightly uneasy due to the tone that Billy has just used which, actually, was pretty fucking rude but it’s not new, isn’t it?

“I don’t… I don’t think it could happen again, out of nowhere. I think you should be aware… just when you’re using your Flayer-power. That’s when it can become dangerous. You have to be in control.”

There’s some silence after this statement. Steve looks around at the people gathered in the room. Will is standing in the middle, the board still in his hands, full of drawings and sketches. Dustin, Lucas, Mike, El and Max are sitting at the table, everyone looking pensive and vaguely wary. Nancy and Jonathan are leaning against the wall, and Joyce is placed next to Billy, a wrinkle between her brows, giving her the trademark ‘concerned mommy’ look.

It’s Billy that breaks the silence, after a while.
“So, ok, I’m understanding here, and correct me if I’m wrong, that we all agree the fact that this… *dangerous possibility* could be totally avoided if I will never use this fucked up power that I even never asked to have, anymore.”

He sounds pissed, like he has been dragged forcibly at some sort of family meeting, and Steve finds himself thinking that, actually, he has a point.
Nancy sighs. “For what I heard, Billy, you didn’t use your powers on purpose. It just happened.” Billy lifts his sight on her, but doesn’t speak back. Which is actually a miracle and a great improvement, to be honest. Maybe he’s learning a little when to shut his tongue. “Yeah… Nancy is right. It could happen again, and we… you need to be prepared.” Jonathan agrees.

Billy looks at him with an unreadable expression, then, after what seems like an eternity, he sighs, defeated. “…Ok. Fine.”

Everybody looks at him in pure shock. “Fine?!” Max repeats, eyes wide. Billy makes a face, annoyed. “Yeah, I said fine. Let’s try this again. Let’s let you teach me how to use the force.” he tells the last words directed to El who smirks back in response, satisfied. “Fine.”

she repeats, barely a whisper.

Dustin chuckles and slams a hand on the table, speaking to Steve without hiding the amusement in his voice. “Here we go! All obedient and polite. Looks like you tamed the beast, Stevie!”
Billy groans aloud, a red tint starts to spread on his cheeks. He looks pissed. And fucking adorable.
“Oh, screw you, Henderson!”

Honestly, it’s still way too odd.

Billy and El have been sitting for a while in the center of the backyard, legs crossed and eyes closed. It looks like they’re meditating, but obviously they’re currently probably having some sort of metaphysical discussion in another dimension.

Steve, Nancy, Jonathan, and the rest of the party are watching them at a safe distance. When too much time passes by, Max eventually gets bored and decides to drag Steve aside, gripping the sleeve of his shirt.

“What?” he spats, annoyed. “Have you two sorted your shit out?” the question sounds tremendously serious, as it is the severity on Max’s look. It’s almost comical. Steve rubs the back of his neck, holding back a nervous laugh. “What… what shit? What are you talking about?” she rolls her eyes, dramatically. Then, she points a thumb towards her seated stepbrother, busy in that strange show of immobility with El. “He’s being a bitch in these days. You know that? All sulking around and cantankerous. Whatever it is, I suggest you solve it, because my brother can be a real pain in the ass. Especially with me.”

Steve smiles, heart warmed. First of all, she has just called Billy ‘brother’, not stepbrother, which is surprisingly cute. Second, the idea of Billy all in a bad mood because of him gives him a strange sense of selfish importance.

“We did, yeah. All sorted out.” Steve reassures. “I’m sorry you were involved in this. I know how difficult he can be sometimes…” he adds, then, a little awkwardly. Max sighs in response. “Yeah, he is an

asshole. But you… you really did a miracle on him." she makes a small pause, looking for the right words to say. "I'm just worried. You fixed his mess, but he can… break again. Losing control."

She's quite perceptive for being that young, Steve has to say. But also, she's clearly underestimating her stepbrother.

"He's stronger than you think." he declares, a small, proud smirk on his face. Because that's true, Billy is not made of glass. Billy is made of iron, lead and metal. He is a fighter.
He turns to look at Billy, still stationed in his spot. Just seeing him there, trying to use his power again, after the incident of the last time… Billy won't surrender that easily. And Steve believes in him, believes he can do that.

Finally, El opens her eyes and jumps on her feet.
"Ok. Bring the dog." she exclaims, resolute, like a sergeant.

"The fuck? A dog?" Steve mumbles in confusion, apparently causing a reaction of indignation in Max, next to him. "Steve… if you had been listening to us, before, you would have known that this is part of our new plan. We're going to make him practice on animals, because using humans is way too dangerous."

Uhm. He guesses that makes sense and, nope, he hasn't listened to a word of their plan, he was too busy spacing out, thinking about Billy's previous sexual experiences.
Mike brings Chester on a leash. The dog looks quite unperturbed, totally unaware of what is going to happen. Poor thing.

"I hope this is gonna work, otherwise I'm killing him with my bare hands." Mike points out at Billy, who finally opens his eyes. Steve can see it: there are throbbing black veins on the boy's neck, and his eyes look glassy. Blood starts to drop through his right nostril, while the dog suddenly stops moving.

"Sit." El orders, standing promptly behind the still seated figure of Billy. Chester sits. The girl nods, apparently satisfied. "Now make him twist."

They continue to make Chester do tricks for a while, under the over-

enthusiasm of Dustin and Lucas.

“Dude, you could join dog competitions with your super-power!” Dustin jokes, and Billy can’t exactly glare at him because his sight is still too focused on the creature that he’s maneuvering with his mind, but he makes sure to be heard with a loud groan. “Shut the fuck up, Henderson. You’re going to regret that.” however, his threats have no longer effect the brats, who started to stop fearing him for a while.

“How long should I continue this show? It’s getting boring.” Billy asks then, while making Chester walking on two legs like a circus pup. “Until you get tired and cannot go on.” El replies, mandatory. Billy grunts in annoyance. “That’s not fucking fair! What if I never get tired at all? Should we stay here all day long? I got shit to do, kiddo, better than…” he stops when he notices that Chester has suddenly gained back his own free will. At this sight, El gives a slight slap on Billy’s back of the neck. “You got distracted! You lost Flayer-Power!” she scowls at him. He growls and massages the hurt spot, face between anger and outrage.

Steve chuckles. He can’t help it. They’re so, so fucking adorable all together. Billy glares daggers at him. “Is that funny to you, Harrington? I swear, when this shit is over, I…” “Back to work!!” El interrupts him, pissed.

“Do what she says, buddy.” Lucas agrees. “She kicked your ass once and she can do it twice with her eyes closed.”

Billy grunts. But sure, Sinclair has made a point.

Steve laughs again. He has heard about the fight in the pool, El has literally thrown him through a thick wall of bricks, crashing it like a nutcracker.
“I love the fact that we can joke about it.” he says, after a while.

So, Billy reaches the quite impressive record of three hours and twenty-one minutes. Then, he solemnly declares that his head is pounding and he’s about to throw up. Steve has entered the house after a while, leaving Billy under the tortures of the screaming brats. So, when he sees the guy walking in the living room, face pale as a

ghost, nose full of encrusted blood and eyes red and puffy, he gets instantly all riled up.

“The fuck did you do to him?!” he yells at the brats, jumping on his feet, making the chair fall down with the movement. Joyce, Jonathan and Nancy flinch at his dramatic reaction, while Billy can’t avoid rolling his eyes in annoyance. “Relax, princess. I’m not a delicate flower, am I?”

“Yup, he’s more like a samurai. A rock.” Dustin agrees, patting the boy’s shoulder and instantly gaining a cold glare in response by him. “He will be fine, just need some rest.” El explains to Steve, smiling sweetly.

Billy throws himself on the couch with a loud groan. “I’m shattered.” he declares and, well, he does look shattered too. Joyce reaches him and gently squeezes his shoulder, in a motherly gesture. “Can I do something for you, sweetheart? You want some tea, something to eat?” Billy pretends to think about it and then puts his best good boy façade. “Maybe… maybe a beer could help my tired limbs, Joyce…” he says with puppy eyes, making Steve huffs in response. “Beer, so!” Joyce disappears enthusiastically towards the kitchen.

Steve’s eyes are glued on him, intent in glaring severely at his figure. “What?!” spats Billy, grimacing. “You shouldn’t drink. You should at least eat something.” Steve complains. “Jesus, Harrington, what are you, my fucking mom?!” “Don’t drink with your stomach empty! Eat something.” “I’m feeling nauseous after all this practice session, ok?!” “Ok?! You’re just proving my point here, Billy.” “Jesus fucking Christ, can’t you live without bitching about something for two seconds, Steve?!” “Can’t you live without being a pain in the ass, Hargrove?!”

Billy blinks, mute. Then, a wolfish grin appears on his face, the kind of grin that doesn’t bode anything good. The kind of grin that precedes a sexual type of banter. “Well… I suppose that there are people who actually lik…” “I’M MAKING YOU A SANDWICH.” Steve interrupts him, yelling way too loud and sprinting to the kitchen.
Damn Billy. He did it on purpose. That was one of his tricks, to play him in front of everyone, throwing snarky gags to make him embarrassed publicly. Asshole. He’s going to pay for that…

He mumbles curses between his teeth while making Billy's sandwich before stopping at the realization that he doesn't know what Billy likes. After a few moments passed in wondering if it's better to go back to him and ask or not, he simply decides that Billy can go fuck himself and adds mustard to the sandwich. If Billy doesn't want to eat like a goddamn child, he's going to make him swallow it with the force.

That sudden idea opens to another long and idiotic train of new thoughts…

"Hey." he flinches at the sound of Nancy's voice behind his back, finding her leaning on the fridge with her arm crossed and a playful smirk on her face. He gains composure, and giggles nervously while running a hand through his hair. "Hey, Nance." she stares at him for a while, without saying anything, with her kind of sweet expression. Steve is starting to feel awkward when she finally decides to speak. "You're cute. Caring about him. You can't help it, you look after the people you love."

Steve squirms on his spot, speechless, because, well… she's kind of right about that, but it's not that he wants to have that type of conversation with his ex. Moreover… he doesn't *love* Billy. Does he?

He can't talk back because she speaks again, this time her voice sounds pensive, almost distant. "You know… he kind of apologized to me." Ok, that's new. And way too odd, almost upside-down odd. Steve gasps in surprise. "Did he?" she nods. "When?" "Before you arrived, today… I mean, it was kind of shitty, to be honest. Not very a heartfelt apology. He told me that he doesn't like me and he never will, but that he knows he has been a jerk and he'll try to be better, from now on."

Steve scoffs. "Yeah, that's more like him." "He didn't expressively say that he's sorry…" "And I don't think he never will, actually." Nancy shrugs in response. "Well, I guess that's the best that I can get from him." Steve laughs back. "Yeah, sorry Nance. I guess so. Take it or leave it."

They fall in a small, awkward silence. Steve can't help but feel his heart relieved and warmed up by the news. Sure, Billy can still work

on being less of an asshole with the people, but he really did a lot of progress and efforts. That day, too… he had spent all the afternoon with El, Max and the others just to practice his power, he had followed orders from a 13-years-old kid all the time and, even though he was complaining no stop, he really demonstrated dedication and sacrifice.

Steve feels proud. So fucking proud of him. And he absolutely needs to show him that.

“You look happy.” Nancy states, out of nowhere. Steve smiles at her. He can’t deny that he is, unbelievably, utterly happy. “Do I? He’s a pain in the ass, makes me so mad all the time.” he jokes. “Well, you’re not the easiest either, Steve Harrington.” Nancy laughs and playfully pushes him. Then, she moves her sight away, thoughtful, and suddenly serious.
“I was wrong.” she states, gravely. Steve sends her a questioning look. “I was wrong.” she repeats, almost to herself. “About you. And him. I’m… I’m just happy you have found each other. I think… I think you’re the right person for him, and he’s the right one for you.”

Shit. That’s something pretty heavy to hear from the person whom you were in love with for so long time, from the girl that practically broke your heart. Still, Steve feels a strange sensation of joy in his chest caused by her words. It’s not that he needed her approval, at all, but knowing that she can be by his side in that crazy, strong and intense new relationship… it’s something reassuring, something good.

He suddenly stupidly looks at the sandwich, thinking how Billy had apologized to Nancy for him, only for him. How Billy has shoved aside his impossible pride just because he cares about him, and wants to make something good for him. To love someone, to care for someone… it’s always like that. A difficult path of waivers and compromises. A life where you own good depends directly on the other person’s one.

He questions again himself if he needed to verify Billy’s taste for the stupid sandwich. He feels guilty. And that’s an idiotic thought, isn’t it? He can almost feel Billy’s voice in his head, spitting something like ‘you’re a fucking bleeding heart, Harrington’. He scoffs at the

stupid idea.

When he gets back to Billy, who's still sprawled on the sofa, beer in his hand, he meets the boy's complaints.
"The fuck did you put mustard for?! Jesus, I hate mustard."

They're making out in the backseats of the Beemer for a while, to Steve's joy. He had insisted to choose his car as the right spot for their making-out session, considered how more spacious it is. Billy, in the end, had to admit his loss, but just because a cause of major force was involved.

The quarry is dark, empty and creepy. There's no one beside them and their cars, and the lights are fading on the horizon.
It's pretty shitty and uncomfortable, to make out in the car. But still, it's not that they had many choices in the matter. Steve's house is still invaded by his parents, while Billy's… well, that place is much more like the devil's lair. So, the car it is.

Billy is about to climb on Steve's lap, a cocky grin on his face between the kisses, when Steve pushes gently his chest and makes his back presses to the seat again.
"Nope, you had a rough day, babe. So now try to relax." he states, playful, moving in front of the boy and giving him a challenging look that Billy gladly accepts. "Damn, Harrington… you sound like a good housewife, here." Steve ignores the comment and starts to leave a trail of kisses on the boy's neck, hungrily.

"We have something outstanding, haven't we?" he speaks to Billy's chest, and the muffled, delicious moan that goes out from the boy's mouth is a statement of acknowledgment. Steve takes his sweet time, kissing all Billy's torso, sliding down slowly and viciously to his groin. He's on his knees, awkwardly stuck in the space between the backseats and the fronts. Not comfortable but good enough to leave him the right space for what he's going to do.

He slides his hands on Billy's tights, while the boy starts to run his fingers into Steve's hair. Gosh. He loves when Billy touches his hair. The touch is gentle, yet so intimate, that gives a pleasant wave into his spine.

He unbuttons Billy's pants, finding out with a smirk that today he's not wearing underpants. Figures. That gives him the sight of the hard, already leaking, perfect cock of his boyfriend.

He reaches a hand to touch it and starts to stroke tentatively, slowly. Jeez. He craved it so much in those days where they have been separated. Adding the interruption of the last time they were about to do something like that, Steve had found himself so full of desire for him that it could be barely contained in public.

Billy's grip on his hair tightens, while he tilts his head back in pleasure. Steve smirks, satisfied, and gives a first lick on him.
"Eyes on me, Hargrove." he orders, then, causing a small chuckle in Billy, who happily obliges the request. Well, Billy is kind of obsessed with eye-contact during sex, so why don't give him the same treatment? It's just fair.

Steve feels particularly bold that night, so he takes a nasty long time to tease Billy as the best as he can. He licks his length, his tip, swirls his tongue, without really taking him on his mouth, until he can see Billy's sweet frustration.

"What? Something wrong?" Steve speaks while rubbing his thumb on Billy's tip, enjoying his cute reaction at the touch. Billy groans. "Come on, don't be a dick." he grunts, grimacing in annoyance and arousal. "Mh… maybe you should ask me nicely." Steve teases, giving another lick over Billy's length, eye glued to him as he likes it. Billy puffs, and looks like he is already too turned on to think straight, because what comes out from his mouth next is way too weird, considering the guy who says it.

"Please, Steve."
Steve smirks and places a kiss on the tip. "Again." he can see the outraged frustration in Billy's eyes, and honestly, that's one of the best looks ever on the boy's face. Billy exhales, surrendered.
"Please."

Finally, Steve decides that it's good enough. "That's a good boy." he declares, playfully, before finally taking him in his mouth. He goes steady and deep, not intentioned in wasting other time. Billy is panting in pleasure while he pets Steve's hair, mouth parted and eyes

almost closed.

“Mh… yeah, that’s good.” he declares, voice cracked and adorably messed up. Steve internally smirks and chases the boy’s orgasm, going hastily, timing with his breath that becomes faster and faster. When Billy comes, a sweet, uncontrolled moan goes out from his mouth. This time Steve is mentally prepared and kind of more confident, so he happily swallows everything Billy has to give to him. It should be gross but it isn’t, it’s part of him.

Steve licks his lips satisfied at the sight of Billy’s afterglow face. He’s still panting, flushed and pleasantly buzzed, Steve can’t avoid feeling a sense of pride at the idea that he caused this, this gorgeous, shocked in pleasure cute expression. He did that. He goes up and presses a chaste kiss on Billy’s lips, who chuckles slightly. “Damn, Stevie… you left me breathless.” Steve laughs back, suddenly feeling like a pro, like he now deserves a medal for the complex art of fellatio or something. Sure, he still can’t compare to Billy’s skills, but he can work on it.

He’s over Billy, awkwardly sitting on his lap, when the boy reaches a hand to his belt. He speaks into Steve’s mouth, working on his jeans while keeping his blue eyes pointed on his.

“Let me touch you.” he whispers, and Steve just smiles and kisses him. He doesn’t even need to ask. Steve has missed the boy’s touch so bad, so when he finally feels the boy’s hand wrapped on his dick, he squirms on his spot in pleasure, making Billy grin in response. He puts a hand on the boy’s back of his neck, making their fronts collide while Billy strokes him.

Billy is so beautiful and perfect at that moment. So good for him. Steve just wishes he could express how strong is the feeling that he has for him in words, or facts. He wants to give everything to him, everything for making him happy.

“Billy…” he whispers into the boy’s mouth, already painfully near his climax after not much time. They share a clumsy kiss, then, Steve speaks again, his voice comes out all cracked and messed up. “…Shit. You’re so fucking beautiful.” and, that’s it. He can’t hold back himself anymore, so he comes in Billy’s fist, moaning into the boy’s mouth.

They stay motionless in the aftermath for a while, just busy gaining back their usual breath. Then, Steve moves next to him and exhales in satisfaction, grinning dumbly to himself.

“I missed you so much.” he declares, looking ahead at him at nothing in particular. He can hear Billy lighting up a cigarette at his side. “Your cock is still leaking, Steve. You get all romantic.” Steve scoffs and turns to him with a grimace on his face. “That’s not exactly connected to this situation in particular, Billy. I missed you, like, generally speaking.” he continues to insistently stares at Billy, who’s smoking avoiding eye contact with the other guy. Then, after a discrete amount of time, Billy just groans in surrender.

“…Fine! I missed you too.”

Steve smirks and presses a sloppy kiss on the boy’s nose. “Aww, that’s cute!” “Fuck off, Harrington.”

They spend the next ten minutes smoking in comfortable silence, both too focused on their thoughts. Steve is spiraling again into self-doubt and overthinking, so he decides that he cannot delay the infamous question forever.

“Listen…” his voice trails off, hesitant. Billy sends him a questioning look; it’s clear that Steve is about to say something that requires a certain amount of effort.
“I… I wanted to ask you something.” “What is it?” Steve sighs and temporizes, causing instant irritation in the other boy.
“Steve, fucking speak. Ain’t got all night.”
“Did you… did you ever fuck with a dude?”

Steve can feel his heart hammering in his chest. It’s stupid, because it’s just a stupid question, just a stupid conversation with the one that is supposed to be his boyfriend, but still, he can’t avoid feeling nervous about it. He’s afraid of Billy’s judgment and well, perhaps, his own internal one. His mind hasn’t stopped to repeat to him that he’s going to fail miserably, he’s going to make himself a fool, to disappoint Billy.

Billy just blinks, caught by surprise. Then, something strange crosses his face, something akin to irritation. “Are you asking me if I am a

fucking virgin?!" "NO! I mean, yes… maybe?" why?! Why the fuck is Billy upset now?! What did he do wrong?! Billy was the first one to put up the 'fuck' topic out of nowhere… so… he shouldn't be the one to get riled up about it, shouldn't he?

Billy grimaces and moves his sight away towards the window of the seat. Steve waits for him to speak again, but this never happens. So, he makes another try.
"It's just… I think we should have this conversation, Billy." the boy scoffs, mean. "Why?" "Because… I don't know, it's just the right thing to do, I guess." "The right thing to do." Billy repeats, venomous. "Look at you, always saint Harrington. What? We're gonna braid our hair and paint our nails next? What the fuck is that for, uh?! We don't fucking need to speak about anything."

Steve represses the urge to roll his eyes in annoyance. Here they are, the infamous coping mechanism, back from the dead every time Billy feels somehow vulnerable and decides to be a bitch about it.

So, looks like the 'previous sex life' topic makes Billy pissed off for some reason. Maybe he's just annoyed because he doesn't want to share his past vicissitudes, but it's kind of odd.

Steve sighs in surrender. Fine, he will figure this out. He needs Robin, because she always knows everything, like some sort of oracle. She surely will be able to tell why Billy has gotten upset for apparently no fucking reason.

Of one thing he's sure; if before he was full of doubts and insecurities about all the 'sex fact', now he's overwhelmed by pure paranoia. His brain cannot stop telling him that he's going to suck at it, he doesn't have any freaking idea of how to act and he's going to ruin everything, everything good they had created in their time together.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Everything is possible in the immagination! I've changed so many things from the original story, adding the resurrection or never death of the dog Chester is just another one ahahah

Go read Lumina's remake!! I'm telling you it's something else.

20. Strange Pleasures

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hullo!
>
> You can find the beautiful remake of this story by Lumina here
>
> I'm actually very excited and nervous about this chapter.

“Robin. I need your help.”

The girl has just arrived at work and she hasn’t taken off her helmet yet that Steve is already asking things. She sighs, keeping back the urge to insult her idiot friend. “Good afternoon to you too, Stevie.” “I’m serious, this is maximum importance, Rob.” Steve completely ignores her evident annoyance and leans forward on the counter, in order to talk to her by secure out-of-reach proximity.

“I need your help to get some gay porn tapes.” he declares, voice firm, expression extremely serious. Robin doesn’t say anything. She just stays silent for a while, her face unreadable and blank. Steve is starting to feel awkward due to her lack of reaction, and when he’s about to take back what he had just said, maybe claiming that it was just a stupid joke, she groans in exasperation.

“Fine. Let me take off my jacket and put my stuff in the storage, right?” she disappears behind the counter without adding anything, leaving Steve shocked and dumbfounded. Did she just agree to his request? For real? He wasn’t too optimistic about it, to be honest, he expected to find just a snark comment in response. Maybe the gay porn thing isn’t too much of a bad idea? He had spent the entire previous night mulling over it in the bed, reaching the conclusion that the only way to not appear ridiculous with Billy the first time they will have sex is to do some research on the topic.

When she gets back, she seats next to him in her usual spot, points her elbows on the surface of the counter, and starts to massage her

temples in what looks like a silent manifestation of stress.

“Ok. This is about you and Billy. Your… first time.” she says, almost to herself, not looking at Steve at all. He nods vigorously. “You’re… scared because you never did it.” at these words, Steve burst into a nervous laugh. “SCARED?! Naah… that’s the stupidest thing you ever said, Robin. Scared, tsks…”

She rolls her eyes and mumbles something between her teeth. “Dingus.” she spats gravely, finally moving her gaze on him. “It’s ok to be scared, you know? It’s normal. You never did that, and you’re nervous because you don’t know what to do. Perfectly normal, ok?” Steve swallows, defeated. It’s not that he can go on deny that truth. Besides, Robin knows anything. As fucking usual.

“Ok.” he nods, sheepishly. “Right. So…” her voice trails off, while it looks like she’s browsing for the right words in her mind.

“If you want to watch porn movies because you want to get instructed a little bit it’s totally fine for me, and also understandable, but… have you considered that maybe the easiest solution for your problem is to talk to your boyfriend? How does it sound, huh?”

Steve scoffs. “Talk to him?! And what, tell him I’m nervous as a little girl, that I don’t know how the fuck should I fuck him? Admitting that I’m incapable?!” Robin shrugs in response. “Yeah. Yeah, pretty much so.” Steve groans, irritated. Talk to Billy… no fucking way. He can see already the mocking grin on the boy’s face, the snide remarks that will come out from his mouth. No fucking way.

They’re interrupted by a middle-age man who gives back three VHS. Steve assists him almost angrily. Then, when they can finally talk with some privacy, he resumes the discussion.

“You don’t understand, Robin… it’s different for guys. I can’t ‘talk’. We don’t do that kind of thing.” Robin exhales an exasperated breath and pinches the bridge of her nose. “God… why me…” she hisses between her teeth, causing confusion in Steve. “What?!” “Stevie.” Robin gives him a stern look, the one that doesn’t leave space for any protest. “It’s not different, ok? It’s exactly the same. Talk to him. Tell him how you feel.”

“Well, I fucking tried, Rob! And, guess what? He got upset for no reason.” Steve has raised his voice without noticing it, getting the attention of the various customers in the store. He clears his voice and tries to gain some demeanor back. Robin looks pensive, like she’s trying to decipher the solution for the complex new problem.
“What did you ask him?” she questions then. “I don’t know… just if he ever had sex with a dude. And, you know how he is… he started to act like a jerk out of nowhere. Classic Billy.”
Robin sighs. “Yeah, classic Billy. It’s your boyfriend, dingus. Your choice.” Steve is almost tempted to say aloud how right she is. Billy is such impossible… sometimes.
“Perhaps he got on the defensive because he felt attacked, vulnerable.” Robin reflects, rubbing her chin pensively. Steve makes a face. “Why would he feel attacked?” “Well… maybe he feels exposed or embarrassed because he’s not very experienced either.”

A contemplative silence follows by.

Billy?! *Not experienced*?! That is a totally foreign concept on the guy. Sure, Steve doesn’t know anything about his past relationship or his sexual experiences… but it’s Billy, for god’s sake. He must have a huge list of adventures. That’s for sure. He’s been with Nathan for nine months, that’s a considerable amount of time, isn’t it? He was sixteen. Mature enough to do all the dirty stuff.

“Steve.” Robin claims his attention. “I hate to tell you this, but If you don’t feel comfortable enough to talk to your boyfriend about this, maybe you’re not ready to have sex with him either.”

Steve gasps, outraged. The possibility of *not* having sex with Billy is an icy cold shower that he really doesn’t want to face.

“I am ready! Jesus, Robin, I swear, I’m so much ready that you have no idea.” Robin clears her voice, slightly flushed. “Well, then there’s only one thing you need to do, dingus.”
Talk to him. Yeah, no need to repeat it.

They have decided to spend their spare hour in the library in a poor attempt to catch up on some homework. It fails miserably, considering how Billy is in the mood to piss off Robin constantly,

instead of staying the fucking quiet and studying how they are supposed to do.

Robin is sincerely irritated by the guy's good grades besides his poor efforts in school. That's not something in accordance with the law of karma. They have pretty much the same results, but she is much more committed. It's just not fucking fair. How can the guy be always so much… annoyingly excellent in everything?! It's just frustrating.

"Hargrove. I'm fucking trying to focus, if you don't mind." she snarls venomously. Billy makes a face and lazily points to her papers. "What's that?" "Calculus. I don't understand a shit." "Gimme."
Now what? Is he a tutor too?

Billy starts to absently read her homework, then, he grabs his pencil and encircles a precise number. "This is where you went wrong, Buckley."

For the next half an hour, Robin finds herself being tutored in Calculus by Billy, and that's pretty strange. Just a few weeks ago she would have laugh at the absurd idea. Billy is not very patient or crystalline in explaining things, but he's not the worse.

They're deeply focused on their work when their attention is caught by a figure standing in front of them. It's a blond girl with backcombed hair, Robin instantly recognized her as Courtney, one of the cheerleaders and 'sort of friends' of Liz. She's the classic popular and fashionable girl.

Robin lifts her sight to her, giving her the snarky look. She just stands, smirking and chewing her gum in a very annoying way, without saying anything.
"…Can we help you?" Robin decides to urge since she's mute or something.

"Billy." she just says, calling the boy's attention, while he has stayed for all the time with his eyes glued to the paper, undisturbed and totally ignoring her. Billy doesn't raise his look, he continues to write, uncaring.

"Hey, Courtney. You need something?" he asks, politely, with a flat

voice. Looks like Courtney needs to put some effort to hold back the disappointment caused by being ignored by someone, under Robin's evident amusement. She finds herself thinking how Billy is such an asshole, but at least he remembered the girl's name. It's something.
"Billy." she repeats, this time firmly. He sighs and drops the pencil, then, he lifts his head to glare icy daggers at her. "Yeah, that's my name. Do you need something?" he pronounces the last question slowly, like he's talking with a slow person too.

Courtney puts up the fakest smile and shifts on her feet. "Oh, nothing. Nothing at all. I was just wondering if you'd like to come to my place after school for, you know… study."
Billy lifts a brow, very slowly. "Thank you. But I'm busy." at these words, Robin can actually feel the iciness that raises in the room. Courtney's expression shifts in something akin to irritation, while she tries to keep her smirk on her face, never stopping chewing that freaky gum, noisily.

"Billy… you know that there are rumors about you, right?" Billy clenches his fist, his eyes darken. The tension in the air is palpable. "Nope. I don't mind rumors." he replies, forcing himself in an uncaring façade.

"Yeah, of course you don't… but see, people talk, you know. This is a small town. Of course, I know that, that rumor… is far from being true. I mean, I know how much you like certain things. I even know where you like to have my hands on."

Robin shots a surprised glare to Billy. So those two fuckers fucked?! Gosh. Gross. The gossips.
"…But still." Courtney continues, maliciously, while Billy is staring at her now with a clear expression of pure disgust. "…Those kinds of rumors are difficult to eradicate, you know? You should think about it."

Billy lets out an ugly laugh. "So you're offering yourself as a volunteer to redeem me? Wow, I'm flattered. But still, it doesn't change a thing. I'm busy today." "Tomorrow?" she insists, tentatively, making Robin facepalms in response.

"Tomorrow too. I will be busy fucking forever, so get the fuck out of

my face and leave me the fuck alone." Billy barks back. He is about to burst. The situation can degenerate at any moment and Robin finds herself not knowing exactly what to do. Should she intervene, and placate Billy? Should she stay outside, and mind her own business?
"So… it's true then." Courtney spats, smirking, lasciviously. "… You're a faggot."

Billy jumps on his feet, making the chair fall over on the ground with the sudden movement. He hisses between his teeth, breathing raggedly through his nostrils and with his eyes with a maniacal frown. "Who fucking told you that?! Was that Robinson, uh?! Did you believe him?! Do you believe every bullshit that people say to you?! Are you a complete moron or what?!"

Finally, Courtney loses her confidence. She gasps like a fish, interdicted. "I… I'm sorry. I didn't mean to…" she stutters, and Robin feels almost pity for her. Almost.
"Ain't gonna repeat it a third time. Get the fuck out of my face." Billy repeats, and this time it really sounds like the last warning. Courtney's lip trembles. She twists and storms out to the room without saying anything, but Robin is pretty sure to hear a strangled sob from her on her way out of the library.

Billy sighs, gaining back some sort of calm, and grabs the fallen chair, peachy.
"Wow… that was sure some display of alpha power." Robin comments, with a sly grin. Billy slides his hands on his face in exhaustion. "Shut up, Buckley." he barks, voice muffled behind his fingers. "…That bitch is gonna spread the rumor all over the school… since I didn't agree to fuck her. Can you believe it?" he laughs bitterly at the absurdity of the situation.

Robin grimaces on that shows of pure masculine misogyny, but sure Billy has a point to be upset of. Some tense silence follows by.

"Do you mind that?" she asks, after a while. Billy moves his hands from his face and sends her a questioning gaze. "To be the school's fag? Of course I fucking do." Robin shrugs. "Yeah, well, I mean… it's just a rumor, isn't it? It's not that they have proof or something." he sighs, tired. "Yeah, I guess so. And anyway… I think the most

important thing is for my father not to hear weird stuff. I don't give a shit about the cows and the preppy kings of this shithole town. They can think the fuck they want, as long as they leave me the fuck alone."

Robin smiles, trying to appear reassuring. She feels almost guilty, all that mess has started with her and Liz. Billy is being involved because of her, because he had defended her that night, at the infamous bonfire party, gaining the enmity of Liz's psycho ex-boyfriend, who is now trying to ruin his life in all the possible ways.

"It's going to be alright. We have just to survive this last year of school, don't we?" she says, half-joking. Billy grimaces. "Yeah, one hellish year, and then we can get the fuck out of this place."
One year.

Billy grins at the sight of the fancy Beemer parked outside the school. His owner is leaning with his back pressed on it, smoking absently, eyes covered by his stupid Ray-Ban sunglasses. Steve has definitely gained back the vice of tobacco, and it's all Billy's fault. He should feel guilty, but honestly, who cares. It's not that he had pointed a gun on the guy's temple, forcing him to scrounge all those cigarettes. At least, now Steve has accepted the fact that he is a smoker again and has started to buy his own packs.

Billy stalks to him, without being noticed. He's tempted to perform an assault on the guy, making him jump like a jittery horse. That would be fun. But no, better to be careful. At least, in public.

"…Feeling nostalgic, aren't you, Harrington?" he spats, finally getting the attention of the boy, who winces slightly at the sudden sound of Billy's voice. The surprise is soon replaced by a sly smirk that vaguely resembles the King Steve's alpha attitude.

"Oh yeah. You know, since I loved this school so much. Especially the last year, when a big Californian asshole has decided to choose me as a target." Billy laughs, totally undisturbed, and positions himself next to Steve, lighting up a cigarette with his back pressed on the car.

"Must be an awful year." he decides to keep up Steve's game,

watching absently at the people roaming in front of him while sucking a long drag of smoke. Steve shrugs. “Yeah, you know. This asshole was really, really insistent. I couldn’t walk in the corridors without finding him, giving me his cocky glances. Always pushing, always searching for my attention.”

Billy chuckles. Yeah… maybe he was kind of insistent. Not that he feels guilty at all about it.
“But on the court… yeaah, that was where this jerk used to give the best of him.” Steve keeps on, finishing his cigarette and throwing it on the asphalt. “He was a decent basketball player.” “Fuck off! I’m an excellent, basketball player.” Billy retorts, not stopping grinning, amused.

“He was always against me. Always shoving and pushing and grinding… Jeez. He was a nuisance. Not to talk about the shower. Always choose the one next to me. Always staring with those big, baby blue eyes…”

Billy laughs again, turning his head to the other side to not show how flushed he actually is due to that raving conversation.
“Do you think…” he starts, then trails off, uncertain. Steve gives him a questioning look, raising his sunglasses to his head. Billy clears his voice. “It’s just… is stupid. I was just wondering if you and me could ever be friends… or more, without monsters and the Mind-Flayer.” Steve pretends to think about it. “Mh, that’s a good question, actually.” after a short time spent in reasoning, he speaks again.

“I guess we could have been friends… if you hadn’t been a complete asshole to me. Concerning the ‘more than friends’ part… I don’t know, I was kind of oblivious since a few months ago. I guess I would have face it, anyway, sooner or later.”
Billy has finished his cigarette too. He blows the last cloud of smoke, pensive, listening to Steve’s speech.

“But, still… I don’t know, I just started to have freaky thoughts about you… and after not much, I realized that it wasn’t just about the fact that you’re hot shit.” Steve tells, always looking at the distant people walking around the parking lot. “Am I? Hot shit?” Billy asks, amused. Steve goes on, ignoring him. “…I was starting to like you as I didn’t do for a long time.”

A pause of silence follows by. Finally, Billy and Steve move their gazes on each other, and for a few seconds, they just look, without saying anything, suddenly all serious, eyes to eyes in a heavy silence.

It's Steve who breaks it. "I want to kiss you so bad, right now." he declares, as a matter of fact. Billy gulps and lowers his sight, suddenly deciding that it's better to avoid eye-contact with the boy. "…I know."

They stay in a companionable silence for some time, then, Steve talks again. "My parents are going to leave on Friday." Billy gives him an interested look, while a playful smirk appears on Steve's pretty face. "Do you want to come over? Or… maybe you're busy…?" he's taking the piss, but Billy wants to indulge his game. "I don't know… I should check my schedule." "Right, well. If your schedule is ok, I would be really delighted to spend some time with you alone, in my big comfortable house."

He's clearly doing a reference to the last time they hooked up in the car, which was pretty uneasy, to be honest. Billy doesn't need that to know that Steve is trying to get him aware of the fact that he wants to fuck. Like, really *fuck*, not hand or blowjobs. They have already discussed it, a couple of times. But still… it's kind of a sore spot, for him.

Above all things, the idea of having sex with Steve is one of the ones that makes him more nervous.

Billy grins, faking confidence, as usual, and looks at Steve. "All right. Since you would be so *delighted*, I accept your invitation to your place." "Marvelous!" Steve responds, faking a vaguely British accent that causes their laughter, as if they're not talking about fucking but having tea together.

To break their lightheartedness, Chris Robinson appears, walking to his car a few meters away. At the sight of them, he makes a gesture that vaguely resembles the cutting of a throat to Billy, causing the roll of eyes in Steve. Billy, instead, sends him a kiss and a wolfish grin.

"Jesus… is he continuing to harass you?" Steve asks, not caring to

hide his preoccupation. Billy shrugs and takes a new cigarette from the pack. “Just this kind of stuff. He hasn’t dared to touch me. I think he’s too scared. He knows I’m gonna fucking end him, if he tries to do something.” Steve doesn’t respond but grits his teeth. Billy knows how he doesn’t want to have him involved in brawls and stuff like that, so he decides to go for reassurance.

“Relax, princess! I told you. I’m not gonna do anything to that sucker. I’m on best behavior, I swear. I don’t really react at his provocations.” Steve gives him a perplexed look, the one that testifies how not sure he is, but then, he just sighs, surrendered. “I know. I trust you. It’s just… I’m never here and I don’t fucking stand the idea that something bad might happen to you.” Billy rolls his eyes. “I’m not a fucking damsel in distress, Harrington.” Steve laughs in response. “I know, I know… you’re more like a lone wolf. The bad, fascinating villain of the story.”

Billy blows a long cloud of smoke. “Yep. You’re right about that, Stevie.”

They share another long gaze, smiling lazily to each other, repressing again the urge to make out, on that freaking side of the car, until their lips are aching, and the breath is missing.

“We’re going to leave tomorrow in the early morning. You will probably be asleep.” His mother announces on the doorjamb. She has a melancholic, pensive frown on her face that looks quite odd, considering the character.

Steve lifts his gaze on her from the bed. He doesn’t know what to say, actually. Should he, at least, pretend to be hurt about their departure? It’s not that their stay there, in their own home, has been exactly pleasant. The tension between them and him has been evident, palpable. Their meals together have been silent, or filled with trivial chatters, mostly from his mother.

Steve nods, face blank. “Ok. I’ll try to wake up early, so I can greet you properly.” “Oh, no need, sweetie…” she approaches him and sits on the edge of the bed. “Listen.” she exhales, sounding tired. It’s strange to see her like this. “I know that it has been difficult for you

and, for what it's worth, I'm proud of you." he raises a brow in confusion. "You are?" sure she's not very capable of showing it.

She exhales and parts her hair. "Yes, I am, sweetheart. You've been on your own for all those years, and you have learned how to look after yourself. I almost feel like we're useless, that even if I wanted to try to set things good with you, it's too late. We weren't here when you needed us most."

Steve gasps and diverts his gaze. It's a pretty much big statement to process. He can almost feel the grip of the holdback tears in his eyes.

"You're right. It's fucking late, isn't it?" he spats, still not looking at her. A foreign touch catches his attention, and he moves his sight on the hand of his mother, gripping his knee. Then, finally, he lifts his eyes on her. Her look is so full of apprehension that she almost seems like a different person. Why's that? And why fucking now?

"I'm so sorry. I know it's useless. But I wanted to tell you that." she whispers, looking on the verge to cry. Steve sniffles and lets out a small, bitter laugh. "Yeah. Yeah, I bet you are." she tightens the grip. "I also wanted to tell you… that whatever thing it is, between you and that boy… you'll always have my support. As long as he makes you happy." now she's definitely crying.

Steve winces, not able to hold back his tears anymore. It's just fucking unfair. Fucking too late.

"Dad isn't of the same opinion." he spits. She sighs. "He doesn't dare to even face the idea that you could be together with a boy. But he will, eventually, give him some time. Or maybe he won't, I don't know, I just wanted to tell you how proud I am. You've done so far, all by yourself."

Steve shakes his head. "Not by myself anymore. I was, in the past. Alone. It gets fucking lonely here, in this big, fancy house. You know that?" he talks with spite, unable to keep it for himself. His mother just swallows and nods absently, tears still dropping on her cheeks.

"But I'm not alone anymore. And it's no thanks to you." He continues to let out, because his mouth is running without his control.

“I know.” she sounds resigned, and seeing her like this, seeing her admitting her faults, her weakness, her failures, is making evaporating Steve’s anger. He can’t stay angry with her when she is like this, this… human. Fragile.

He sighs. “…I know you know.” he exhales after a while.

She leans forwards and caresses his cheek, smiling bitterly. “I’m sorry.” she says. And then she repeats it, a second, a third time. Like a mantra, emptied of his meaning. Hollow words, pronounced too late. Her lack of timing is the most painful thing.

“I’ll try to wake up early tomorrow morning.” Steve announces, caressing her hand. Her fingers are cold.

It’s not that they have never been in his room before.
It’s not that they have never been kissing, on his bed, or on his couch, before.

Despite this, everything feels foreign for Steve. He’s nervous, so fucking nervous, while he kisses the boy’s clavicle, thinking how he needs to do the fucking talk to Billy right now before it’s too late. They’re making out, still completely dressed, for a while. Clearly the activity will get friskier soon.

So, he parts from him and looks into his eyes with a serious frown that causes Billy’s instantly half-amused half-confused gaze.
“What? Why did you stop, pretty boy? You look like someone has just killed your dog.”

Steve sighs. He can do that. He can fucking do that. It’s not that hard. And, after all… it’s just Billy, goddammit. No reason to be scared.
He hesitates, moving a hand to cup Billy’s cheeks, under his curios scrutinizing. Then, he just takes a long breath, preparing himself to finally say aloud those words.

“…I want to fuck you.” he declares and, well, that’s nothing new, isn’t it? Billy’s gaze shifts just a little. He looks like a curious bird, waiting for Steve to go on. Damn, this is way more difficult than what expected.

“I want to fuck you… but I have never done it with a dude. As you already know. And I don’t know how. How should I… do that. And I’m scared shitless, because I think I’ll fuck it up, uhm, not in the good way.”

Billy listens to him in excruciating silence. His lack of response is making Steve feel worse, so he leans back in a seated position. After some more unbearable seconds, Billy just nods slightly. “Mh.” “Mh?!” Steve repeats, outraged. “Is that all you have to say, Billy?!” the boy smirks and points his elbows on the mattress, raising up a little. “No, go on. I’m listening.”

He’s clearly taking the piss. As usual. As every fucking time Steve tries to start a serious discourse with him. He sighs. “It’s just… I want to make it good for you. And I’m sure you’re some sort of… expert. I don’t want to disappoint your expectations.” “I’m some sort of expert?” Billy asks, lifting a brow, his face crossed by pure amusement. Steve blushes and groans. “Don’t be a dick. I’m sure you have a lot of knowledge and experience in the field, like fucking everything. You’re always… good, in whatever thing you do.”

“So, you think I’ve been doing a lot of sex. Trying all the position, tricks and stuff. That I’m an ‘expert’ in taking cocks, isn’t it?” Billy inquires in a clear mockery tone that makes Steve blush harder. “You know I would never say that, but yeah, pretty much so.” He admits. Is it that stupid?

Finally, Billy gains some seriousness. His face darkens a little. He moves his gaze to the floor, and suddenly he looks small, frail. Steve craves to see him like that, it makes him want to cradle the boy, to protect him from everything into his arms. He’s the only one that can see Billy like this, that can have him exposed like this.

Billy’s voice comes out low, like a whisper. “…I’m not. An expert, as you said.” “You’re not?” Steve leans forward, getting closer to him. Billy still avoids eye-contact, as if that admission is too much to show. Steve knows how difficult is for the boy to open up, so every time he does that, every time he puts aside his pride for him, his heart twitches in delight.

“I did it just once.” Billy exhales, after a while. He’s blushing. Jeez,

that's the most beautiful sight for Steve. He caresses Billy's cheek.

Damn… just once. That's way beyond unexpected. He's practically a virgin! Steve is overwhelmed by a new sense of boldness. He rubs his thumb all over Billy's jawline, stopping on his lip.

"Can you teach me? Can you help me? I want to make it good for you." Steve speaks, voice soothing and low, like he's approaching a wounded animal. Being with Billy feels pretty much like that, sometimes. Billy nods, finally looking up at him. He has a worried frown that makes him look vulnerable.

"There's no way you wouldn't make it good for me." he states, gravely. Then, without adding a thing, he takes Steve's thumb in his mouth and starts to suck it, lazily, casually. Steve is mesmerized by the sight and looks at Billy with his thumb on his mouth and his beautiful eyes pointed straight to his, and goddamn how the hell can he be so gorgeous? Fuck. He almost makes him wanna cry, freak out, like some sort of Stendhal Syndrome, amazed by too much beauty.

Steve gently removes his thumb, but just to replace it with his tongue because he wants to kiss him. He wants to kiss him until their lips are dried and the oxygen is lacking. That would be good enough.

"You need to prepare me… slowly." Billy pants between the kisses. Steve makes a small nod on his mouth. "With your fingers… and some…. Uh, lubricant. Since I don't exactly get wet there."

Steve has moved to his neck, hungrily. At his words, he moves back and looks at him, furrowed brows. "Won't it be painful?" he asks, voice full of reverent awe. Billy smirks and gets back on his mouth, biting his lower lip. "Nope. I do it all the time on myself." Steve gasps. Billy's teeth are all over his neck, biting and licking the hurt spots feverishly. "You do it on yourself…" Steve repeats. He feels the boy nodding on his throat.

He can't help it; he lets out a small laugh and grips Billy's soft curls into his fingers. "That's fucking hot, Billy." he doesn't respond, he just continues his treatment, moving to his shoulder. "…I can do it… if you want." he says, tentatively. "I can prepare… myself. For you." he adds, then, causing a sudden shiver in Steve's spine. He gently

pulls back Billy's head, forcing him to look at him.

"No way. I want to. Jesus, I want to, so fucking bad."

Billy smiles. "Yeah?" "Yeah." as to confirm, Steve presses a quick peck to the boy's nose. "Show me." he whispers, then, on his lips.

There is a moment where Billy doesn't do or say anything, he just stares at Steve with an unreadable expression. Steve is about to think that the boy has maybe changed his mind, but then, Billy parts and reaches a hand to his leather jacket, dropped on the floor of the room. Steve can see him rummage through the pockets, then, he notices the small bottle of lube in the boy's hand.

"You came organized." he comments, sarcastic. Billy scoffs. "If it were for you, Harrington, you would have fuck me with your spit, so, thanks but no thanks." well, fair enough. Steve just stares at him, dumbly, waiting to see what's next. Billy smirks, as if they're having one of their usual staring contests, and then speaks playfully. "… Pretty sure we have to undress now, pretty boy."

Steve flushes badly and clears his voice. "Yeah, yeah. Of course." he leans forward to kiss Billy again, while the guy is laughing smugly into his mouth. He can hear him saying something like 'such a dork' between their kisses.

They make out for a while, and slowly they shirts go off, followed by all the rest. When Steve is naked on him, elbows pointed on the mattress, he's trembling slightly again, but luckily, it's almost imperceptible. Billy takes his hand and the bottle of lube and drops some of the content on his finger.

"Go on. Start with one." he invites Steve. He looks calm, but maybe he's faking his nervousness too. It would be typical. Steve swallows and looks at his fingers stupidly. "I should…" his voice trails off. Billy sighs, almost out of patience. "Yeah, you should stick a finger into my asshole, Stevie. That's what we're doing here, in case you haven't noticed." Steve grunts, annoyed, but in reality, he's almost relieved to find Billy's usual lighthearted banters.

He tentatively reaches his finger on Billy's hole, tracing the entrance with a touch. When he presses it inside, he scrutinizes Billy's reaction, but he can't find much. Billy inhales, but looks quite undisturbed.

He leans down to kiss him. Billy kisses him back, sinking his fingers into his hair. "Bad?" Steve asks, tentatively, on his mouth. Billy actually rolls his eyes at this and it's kind of hilarious. "Jesus fucking Christ, Steve, it's just a finger in my ass. Move it already."

Steve does what he's been told without discussions. He studies Billy's reaction while he moves a digit inside him, trying to decipher the boy as if he was a complex equation. After some time, he removes his finger, just to add another one, not after covering it in a discrete amount of lube. This time, Billy looks more involved, as he exhales a long breath after the new intrusion.

"Hurt?" Steve asks, wondering if he's doing it too fast, too deep, too hard. But Billy shakes his head. "Nope. Go on." Steve does so, starting to scissoring his fingers inside, his eyes pointed at the beautiful boy under him, enjoying the delicious sounds he's starting to make. "Will you tell me? If it hurts?" he asks, almost a whisper. Billy grimaces. "I told you… I'm not, uh… a fucking damsel in distress…" his voice is adorably cracked and messed up. Steve smiles and kisses him again, with sloppy tenderness. "I know."

When he happens to rub on a particular spot, he makes Billy squirms and exhales a frantic breath. He doesn't know if it's in pain or pleasure.

"Bad?" he asks, tentatively, studying Billy's face. He grips his arm and shakes his head in response, but doesn't say anything. Steve decides to try again to insist on that particular spot, and what comes out next from Billy's mouth is a low, delicious, filthy moan.

"You like it? Here?" Steve asks, unable to keep back a satisfied smirk on his face. Billy is panting, flushed red. His eyes are half lidded, and his head slightly turned, like he's trying to hide from Steve. He bites his lip and spats just a cracked 'Shut the fuck up', that makes Steve chuckle.

“I think you do.” Steve teases, rubbing that spot again and again, looking with enthusiasm at how messed up Billy is at his treatment. He kisses him, swallowing his moans and puffs, feeling bold and almost mean for how much he wants to wreck the boy.

He takes his sweet time to continue the treatment on Billy, until the boy is in a state between the pleasure and the exasperation.
“Just…” Billy breathes out, biting his lip. “…Go on. Put another one.” he orders, then.

Steve hesitates, he doesn’t want to do things hastily, and Billy tends to be inconsiderate with his own being. But still, he must trust him. If he says that he’s ready that means that he’s ready.

So, he goes with the third. This time, Billy grits his teeth and clenched Steve’s bicep in a solid grip. Steve’s heart twitches at the sight. Before he can get to ask Billy if he’s ok, the boy speaks for him.

“It’s alright. Just… give me a minute, will ya?”

“Of course. All the fucking time in the world.” Steve answers, kissing the boy again, with sloppy tenderness. He can feel him relaxing under his body, breathing slowly and steadily. So, he starts to move again, never stopping to kiss him. This time he goes straight to that bundle of nerves that makes Billy squirms in pleasure, loving all the dirty, hit sounds that the boy is making under him. This is something else, Steve wishes he could impress that image of Billy in his mind to repeat it forever any time he wants.

“Steve… fuck… just… get on with it.” Billy whimpers. “Mh… I don’t know. I like the view.” Steve jokes, cocky. Billy glares at him, or at least try but it’s not that he has exactly control over his reaction at the moment. After some more sweet time, Steve decides that he had enough, and pulls out his fingers from Billy while leaning forward to kiss him again.

Then, he makes sure to cover his cock in a considerable amount of lube and positions himself on Billy’s hole. He stops, looking at the boy under him.

They share a long, intense gaze.

“Ok?”

He nods, and Steve doesn’t need any further encouragement.

It needs some strength to get in. It’s incredibly tight and Steve can’t help gasping, while Billy’s grip on his bicep tightens more. Billy grimaces and Steve instantly recognizes that it’s not in pleasure, so he stays motionless, waiting for them to set in. He kisses Billy’s temple, soft, soothing.

“It’s ok. It’s ok…”

He waits for Billy’s breath to gain back normality, feeling the boy’s body getting less tense.

“You’re beautiful, you know that?” Steve tells him, finding Billy smiling back in response. It’s almost a smirk, and that’s reassuring. “I’ve been told.” he says, smugly. Steve makes a small laugh and kisses his chin. “Yeah, I bet you have…” he leaves a trail of kisses all over the boy’s jaw, then, after some time, he finally decides that he can start to move.
The first thrusts are slow and tentative. He looks at Billy’s reactions, trying to find pain or nuisance in them. When he goes on, he notices how Billy’s breath is shifting while his body is gradually starting to be more and more accommodating with his movement, bucking up his hips, chasing him.

“Fuck… feels so fucking good, you’re amazing, baby…” Steve stutters, voice cracked and out of control. He’s actually surprised by the shit he can say in those moments, but it really comes out so naturally.

“Steve…” He knows how the normal Billy would have probably replay to him with some banter, but this Billy, the one that is moaning in pleasure, hisses his name between his teeth like a prayer.

Steve rolls his hips and hits that spot again, the one that makes Billy sees starts. The boy buries his face in the crook of Steve’s neck and his moans turn into something akin to sobs. It’s the most delicious sound that Steve has ever heard, and he wants more, it’s not enough, so he goes faster and harder, making him twitch into his arms.

“Fuck… Steve… I can’t…” Billy cries noncoherently, and Steve just nods and moves a hand on the boy’s cock, and it’s not after much that he finds his fist covered in spunk while Billy lets out a strangled, almost painful moan on Steve’s neck.

He stops, looking at the boy in his post-orgasm expression, questioning him what to do with his eyes. Billy is panting hard and trembling slightly. He just nods, his face flushed and covered in few droplets of sweat, hair smeared on his forehead. Steve leans down to kiss him, as if he’s silently trying to apologize, then, he fucks him hard and fast, chasing his own climax under the muffled whimpers of Billy.

He comes for what feels like an eternity, letting out a long exhale in Billy’s shoulder.
Then, for some time, there’s just silence, and peace. There’s only the sound of their still frantic breaths.

Steve finally moves out and lay down with his back on the mattress, his shoulder touching the other boy’s one.
“Holy shit…” he hisses, shocked in the afterglow. Billy stays silent, eyes pointed on the ceiling.

“That was…” Steve starts, then, he moves on his side to face the boy. “…That was amazing.” he lets out a small laugh, stupidly, because his mind is still overwhelmed by the pleasure and he can’t think straight at that moment. Finally, Billy moves his gaze on him. He looks a bit ravaged; messy curls glued to his forehead and breath still irregular through his nostril. Steve finds himself thinking how fucking adorable he is, with his blue giant baby eyes and his eyelashes and that fucking cute freckles.... How can someone be a nasty asshole and such a cuteness at the same time? That’s a mystery, that’s what it is.

Billy smiles, finally, as he has just gained his mind back, and playfully kisses his nose.

“I don’t think I’ll be able to go on the court tomorrow.” he jokes, making Steve laughs in response.
“Seriously! King Steve with his king-size dick…” Steve pushes him on the shoulder. “Shut up!” he barks, never stopping giggling. “You

ruined me here, amigo."

They chuckle like two idiots, foreheads collided and nose almost touching. Then, out of nowhere, they just stare at each other, suddenly all serious. Steve swallows and moves a hand to cup Billy's cheek. He looks at those beautiful eyes, rubbing his thumb over the boy's cheekbone.

"You know what…" he starts, and then his voice trails off, because he knows he's about to do something really stupid. But… fuck it. They just had sex. No, they made love. It was amazing, better than everything, and emotional, intense, and… yeah, fuck it. He's going with the flow.

Billy is staring curiously at him, blinking with his eyes in a frown, waiting for him to speak.
Steve sighs.

"…I love you."

Billy widens his eyes in shock, paralyzed.

"I fucking love you, Billy. I think I do." Steve insists, voice firm and confident. Billy doesn't say anything, just look at him with an unreadable expression. He almost looks… concerned?

"You *think* you do?" he asks, sounding skeptical. Shit. Maybe it's his bad choices in the matter of words, why he needs to be always such a goofy dork?! Dammit. Now Steve stutters, nervousness evident in his voice.

"Yeah, I do, actually. I mean, I'm sure. No doubts."

Again. Just silence. Steve is starting to feel extremely uncomfortable. Just when he's about to bolt away, maybe throw himself out of the window and disappear forever in order to escape from that embarrassing scene, Billy laughs. Actually, laughs. Steve feels the heat creeping on his neck. Before he can do anything, Billy cancels the distance between their mouth and presses his lips on his, in a soft, chaste kiss.

"I love you too, dork." he whispers in his mouth, and Steve doesn't

know how to feel about the fact that Billy has just taken the piss with him after he has declared for the first time something so important. Fuckin asshole! He should punch the boy for that, but he can't, actually, because Billy has just said that he loves him back, so his anger is covered by a strong, impossible wave of warmth in his chest.

Damn him. He's the worst, seriously.

21. After laughter comes tears

Notes for the Chapter:

Hullo!

We are going towards the end :)

Billy must be really in love with Steve.
Must be utterly, deeply infatuated by the madness of love.

That's the only explanation for him, being in the Arcade, playing *Robotron:2084* with Dustin fucking Henderson. But the creepiest thing is that he's enjoying it.
"Son of a bitch!" Dustin yells while maneuvering his joystick frantically. Billy puts up his best wolfish grin but doesn't leave his eye from the screen. "I'm kicking your ass, Henderson." that's technically not true, since Dustin is the one who is winning, but Billy is more the type that 'fake it 'till he makes it', so he needs to play the cool card.

It all started with Steve. Billy really, really wanted to see him, since he hasn't got much spare time in those days and, well, their previous encounter has been… quite intense. But Steve has started to babble about the fact that he had promised Henderson that he would have gone to the Arcade with them, that they don't hang out that much anymore (Billy had made a face while hearing that). So, in the end, Steve has put up the solution of Billy joining them. Of course, in different circumstances, Billy would have simply told the guy to fuck off, but jeez, he really has a soft spot for Steve. And he really wanted to see him, even with a crowd of brats between them. So, in the end, he agreed to the strange proposition.

And here he is: playing a dumb game with a nerd kid, and enjoying it!

The thing is, he can't help it, he loses his head when it comes to competition. He gets this wave of nervous energy, his hands start to itch, and he really, really can't stop until he wins.

“Come on, Dustin! You can’t let this dickhead beat you!” Mike yells next to him, making Billy grimacing in annoyance. That little cunt. “I can hear you, Wheeler.” He hisses through his teeth.

Steve is watching the scene with a shit-eating grin. Yeah, he probably finds it really amusing, top-grade comedy. Fucking fucker.
In the end, Dustin wins. Figures.

“IN YOUR FACE, HARGROVE!” he shouts, making the ‘loser’ gesture on his forehead. The brats chirp and holler in joy while Billy grunts and throws his arms in the air.
“Screw this! This game is stupid, you’re stupid!” he spats, venomous. Max rolls her eyes. “Very mature, Billy.” he gives her the finger and starts to walk towards the exit, when Steve calls him, chasing him with a small, goofy run.

“Hey, where are you going?!” he grabs his bicep, making him twist on the spot. “Don’t piss your panties, princess, just going out for a smoke.” at these words, Steve looks almost hurt. If he isn’t too cute… but it’s not that Billy can show it. He would love to kiss the guy just right there, reassuring him, telling how he’s not gonna disappear anywhere.
“I go with you.” Steve declares, resolute as if he’s talking about starting a pilgrimage and not just going out for five minutes. Billy grins, while the hand of his boyfriend is still clenched on his arm.

“The brats need you, pretty boy. And, by the way, I don’t need you on my ass all the time, I am a big grown boy.”

This statement has the power to light something inside Steve. His expression shifts, suddenly, while on his face appears an amused, sly smirk. “…I believed you liked having me on your ass… Hargrove.” He gets closer and whispers to Billy’s ear, giving him goosebumps at the sound of his voice. Billy chuckles, and an uncontrolled heat spreads on his cheeks “…Maybe. Don’t be so full of yourself, Harrington.”

Steve scrutinizes him, pensive, still incredibly too close on his face. Billy is internally squirming at the proximity, a part of him wants just to cancel their distance and stick his tongue into the brunette’s mouth, the other part wants to take a step back and get into safe

waters again, away from prying eyes. They're in public, for fuck's sake. Steve just loves to play with fire.

He speaks barely a few inches from his face. "I can't stop thinking about what we did on Sunday."

Billy swallows and diverts his gaze. *You're not the only one*, he would say, but for some strange reason, he just stays silent. Steve doesn't move, he continues to speak in Billy's ear, a silken whisper.

"The sounds you made, the way you smelled… I just can't stop repeating the scene in my mind, over and over. You fucked up my head, Billy."
Billy shivers, while his cock makes an interested twitch, responding to Steve's words. Damn, what that guy can do to him with his dirty tongue…
He tries to put up his usual façade, grinning wolfishly and speaking with a mocking tone.

"Been jerking off a lot thinking about me, princess?"
"Yeah, yeah I did, actually." as usual, the brutally honest answer of Steve causes something between flattering and hilarity in Billy. But this is not the fucking moment to play like this and, considering how inconsiderate Steve is being, he needs to bring him back to reality.

He pokes Steve's chest playfully, making him step back. "Calm the fuck down, tiger. We're in a crowded place." his tone, however, is not stern; he can't hold back the amusement of the situation. Steve, this time, grips his wrist.

"I know!" he whines, almost pathetically. "But how can I be calm when I'm in the same room with you?! You literally messed up my brain, dude, seriously. I can't think straight. Like, now…" he makes an emphatic pause, looking around himself. "…I would fuck you, so much, on that flipper…" he points to the machine. Billy burst into a laugh and pushes him.
"Shut the fuck up!" he yells, not able to keep back the laughter and not able to put some venom into his voice. Steve, unperturbed, continues his game, getting closer to him and speaking attached to his face. "I would have you bent, with your beautiful, tanned back under my chest…"

Jesus fucking Christ. Steve is the shyer one, usually! Billy scoffs. He can't continue Steve's flirting game, because, otherwise, his rising erection would become problematic, so the only way to beat him is with some cunning.

He fakes seriousness, stopping smiling suddenly and glaring at Steve. "I'm sorry-" he spats, this time his voice is poisonous and sharp, "-who the fuck told you that I would let that happen? Aren't you just tripping too much with your imagination, Stevie?! What am I, a fucking sex doll?!"

Steve gasps, shocked and flustered. Bingo! He fucking made it. The poor boy stutters something, suddenly looking like shit, all distressed and worried. Honestly? It's simply amusing.

"I'm sorry! Yeah, you right, I'm an idiot… shit, I don't think that of you. Shit, I'm so fucking stupid…"

Billy can't hold it longer. The corner of his mouth cracks in a tiny smile, while Steve's expression shifts from anxious panic to a shocked one.

"You… you're taking the piss!"
Billy shrugs. "You're just too easy, pretty boy."

Steve snorts and runs a hand into his hair. "I can't believe it! You're fucking unbelievable! You… damn it, you gave me a heart attack, you know that?!"
They share other laughs and pushes until they finally realize that a whole lot of brats is staring at them. Steve jumps on his spot, suddenly getting back to reality.

"Woah! Haven't seen you there, guys!" he says too loud, giggling nervously.
"You two are finished? We have a game to play." Mike questions, severe, arm crossed on his chest and a raised brow.

Billy decides that it is the right moment to escape, leaving Steve melting with his own embarrassment. He goes outside the building and leans his back on the sidewall, lighting up a cigarette in slow motion.

Steve is a dork, but he's not the only one that has been insistently thinking about Sunday. Just the thought gives him a chill on his spine. They had sex. Nope, they made love. They fucking told each other that they're in love… and it sounds like an impossible thing to say, but Billy knows how true it is. He wishes he could scream how much he's in fucking love with the guy. His mind is literally overwhelmed by the feeling and he can't think about anything else, it's like there's a mist on his thoughts, his head is dizzy and stunned by it.

They had sex. And it was fucking awesome. And it's also awesome to know that they will do that again and again, that they're together and in love and it's so beautiful and perfect and doesn't even seem real.

He would never suspect that his life would have taken this turn. Damn, he almost believed that he wasn't even capable of love, that Nathan had dried it all from him, suck it up until leaving an empty shell moved by anger and hate, as he was. Steve gave him reasons, reasons to live and not just to survive, he made him think about himself. It's just his merit if Billy has started to try to improve himself, to fix his life.

And yeah, to have a blessing as a person like that, can be like walking on a thin line. If the person will go, you'll find yourself probably worst than before. But, at least, right now it looks like a distant possibility.

He's so involved in this train of thoughts that he almost doesn't notice the arrival of a certain, obnoxious guy flanked by two thugs.
Billy makes just a slight squirm in surprise on his spot, because he had been taken off guard. Seriously, what the fuck is he doing there? That is the last place where he expected to find Chris freaking Robinson and his crew of idiots.

The guy stands a few meters from him, grinning ferine, like a predator. Billy keeps the eye challenge without saying a word, waiting for him to speak first.
After what seems like an eternity passed just in staring at each other like alpha wolves of the pack, Chris finally talks.

“Fancy seeing you here, Hargrove. What the fuck are you doing? Playing dumb videogames like a retard?”

Billy scoffs and continues to smoke, unperturbed. “Pretty sure that’s none of your business, Robinson. What the fuck do you want?” Chris sneers and shares complicit glances with his boys. Then, he makes two steps ahead, getting dangerously closer to Billy’s personal space.

“What do I want?” he mocks, hands pointed in the pockets of his varsity jacket. “What do I want?” he repeats, again, to remark the concept. Billy just raises his brows. Damn, that dude is such an asshole…

After another, dramatic pause, Chris makes a step ahead, now barely a few inches from Billy’s face and, yeah, he’s definitely entering in the danger zone for Billy’s advice.
“…I want to fucking end you.” he hisses, right to Billy’s motionless face. But he’s not impressed, not at all. He takes another long drag and blows the smoke over Chris, slowly. “Yeah? I’d like to see you try.” he spats, in the end.

Chris makes an ugly laugh and then finally retrieves a little, creating some comfortable space between them. Maybe he had learned the lesson at the bonfire; he was dangerously near his face and dangerously near to receive another head-butt in response to the invasion of Billy’s personal space.

“I saw Harrington’s BMW at the parking lot. Is he here too?” Chris says out of nowhere, causing an internal movement of annoyance in Billy’s guts. The fuck does he want now from Steve? Their thing has nothing do to with him.
Billy doesn’t respond, but his expression has gone sour, and looks like Chris knows how to hit in the sore spots.

“You guys are cute. Who’s the girl in the relationship?” Chris insists, while Billy’s face becomes angrier and angrier. He can’t help it. “You’re fucking delirious, man.” He snarls, but his voice is faltering, it’s clear how is trying to hold back the impending rage and Chris knows how to instigate it. How to add fuel to the fire.

He makes a step ahead and talks in his ear.

“I bet you are… Hargrove. Yeah, I bet you love to get fucked in the ass by Steve’s big cock, like a pussy. That’s what you are, you’re not a man, Hargrove, you’re a gi...”
He can’t continue. Billy has shoved him back violently, making him almost losing balance. His mind has gone red, every emotion, every sensation has been completely replaced by just an insane, boiling rage.

He throws the cigarette to the ground and stares wide-eyed at Chris who’s now grinning satisfied. The fucker whistlers. “Looks like I get it right. You’re the pussy one!” his thugs laugh and exchange glances, while Billy is trying to control his breathing. His mind has gone completely berserk.

There is a tiny rational part in him that knows that Chris is just messing with him, trying to get him angry to have a fight that has nothing to do with him personally. He knows that he should just fucking drop it, that he’s not worthy, that he’s just a poor fucker, desperate because his girlfriend has dumped him. But that rational part is now completely buried under a thick layer of anger.

What happens next is too quick and absurd to be rationalized. Chris snaps out of nowhere, fast like a hawk. He has already proven how fast he is on the court, and the answer is: too much. Billy can only glimpse the flick of the knife that the fucker was clenching into his pocket, keeping it hidden, then, with the same, impossible velocity, Chris’s head is suddenly banging hard on the roof of the nearby car.

Billy hasn’t done anything, hasn’t moved a single muscle, but he can feel the blood dripping from his right nostril, and can feel his veins throbbing in his neck too, a sign that is using that damn power without knowing it at all.

He stares horrified at the terrifying scene, incredulous and wide-eyed. Chris’s head hits the spot a second, then a third time. Nobody is moving him; he’s doing it all by himself. He’s not even screaming or yelling in pain, he just continues to bang his head on that metallic surface while droplets of blood sprinkle through his mouth, his nose, his front.
The two thugs gasps in shock, frozen on their spot. A tooth spurts out from Chris’s mouth and drops to the concrete black asphalt, now full

of blood.

Billy feels shocked and paralyzed, a moment before he was just ready to kill the guy, but now, seeing him being beaten to death by his own damned power without having any control of it, is making him feel nauseous.

“Stop… stop!” he hisses, on the verge to cry, but there’s no use, Chris isn’t stopping. “Please, please stop!” he tries again, now sounding desperate and pathetic. Panic takes control of him. He doesn’t know what to do, he’s staring at the incessant movement of the boy frozen, paralyzed in fear and shock, while Chris’s friends are having his same reaction.

This is all his fault. He should have listened to El when she was saying that he needed to learn how to handle his power to perfection. That power… that power is a fucking curse. It has saved him and the others, sure, but it has also caused a lot of trouble. And now Chris is gonna fucking kill himself because of him and he has no freaking idea how to stop it, how to gain control again!

While he can’t almost breathe due to his raging terror, a miracle happens, and the guy finally stops hitting his head on the roof of the car. Billy gasps in surprise. Chris is now motionless, but he looks kind of restless, like he hasn’t really stopped but he has been frozen by some sort of mysterious force. Billy questions himself if he’s the one that is doing that, only to realize that, not, it’s not his merit. He twists and notices El, standing promptly a few meters from them, a hand stretched towards the boy and a trickle of blood dripping from her nostril. She’s not alone. Max, Steve and all the gang are looking wide-eyed at the scene, behind her back.

She’s the one who is keeping Chris back from smashing his head until death.

Billy stutters, frightened and upset. “El! El I swear it’s not my fault, I didn’t mean to, he just started… I didn’t know how to stop it!”

El nods, almost imperceptibly, but her eyes stay glued to Chris, who’s trembling motionless in his spot. His face looks fucked up, he’s completely soaked in blood, his nose is heavily broken, lips split up,

cheekbones red. His face is so unrecognizable that is creepy. Steve's work was nothing compared to this. Billy finds himself thinking how he's truly a monster.

"Billy. I know. But you need to focus. Breathe. You're making it worse." El speaks, slowly and low. Billy blinks in confusion, her calmness is strange. Shouldn't she be angry at him? He was killing a man due to his own rage and it wasn't even the first time.

He can hear Chris's friends muttering something like 'what the hell is going on' or how's that possible', but it's not that he gives them much attention.
"Billy." El speaks again, firmly. "I can't keep him like this for long. You need to stop it. You can do it. Just focus."

Those words have the power to rile him up even more. She's going to lose her grip, Chris is going to start again to try to kill himself, he's going to be a killer, and it's not the only victim on his account, just a fucking another name in a long list, because he's a monster, he's pure evil, he's no different from the Mind-Flayer, he IS the fucking Mind-Flayer!
El notices his accelerated breathing and his eyes fulfilled with pure horror. So, she tries to soothe him again.

"Billy. It's going to be ok. Trust me. Do you trust me?" she turns her head towards him, slightly, waiting for a response. After some seconds, Billy nods. He needs to get his shit together, he needs to trust El. El knows what she's doing, El knows how to solve this.

"Good." she comments, smiling, like she's not keeping still a guy with her mind power and making a discrete effort in doing it. "Now close your eyes. Breathe. Calm down."
Billy does it, even if it sounds absurd and crazy.

He closes his eyes and tries to slow his breathing.

Soon, he finds himself in that dimension without space and time. The void. It's just him, El and Chris, who's still paralyzed under the power of El. For some strange reason, Billy feels already calmer.

"You can do it, Billy. Just breathe." she says, like a mantra. And Billy

breathes. A long inhale, a long exhale. He makes a few steps towards Chris, facing his swollen, battered face. He made that. The sense of guilt and shame at this sight is unbearable.

He whispers to the boy. He knows that he can't hear him, but still, it's something that he needs to do.
"I'm sorry. I'm fucking sorry."

Then, he closes his eyes again and suddenly he's back to reality, with Chris that is screaming in front of him, curled up on the asphalt, his hands on his face. The boy is screaming and crying without saying anything, probably too overwhelmed by the harsh pain to be able to say an articulate word. His friends rush to him and grab his shoulders, panicked.
Billy sighs and diverts his gaze, he can't keep the sight of that pathetic, violent show. When he looks at El, Max, Steve, and the others; he finds different kinds of expressions on their faces. Will, Lucas, Dustin and Mike have a frown of fear and anger; they don't believe him. They think he did it on purpose, it's clear. Max looks wary and confused, El has an unreadable frown and Steve… Steve is giving him an annoying, empathetic glare.

He moves his mouth to speak but finds himself without words. For at least something like thirty seconds, the only sound is the pained yelling of Chris, who's still lying on the ground. Then, he can't say anything else, because a sudden intrusion of two new individuals bursts into the scene.

Billy finds himself pressed against the rough, concrete wall; his arms painfully twisted behind his back. The next sensation is just the cold metal of a pair of handcuffs, and a voice yelling in his ear that he's under arrest.

He almost wants to laugh at the irony of the situation.
Yeah, someone called the cops and they fucking arrived in time.

He's going to jail, after years passed by hearing from everyone that prison would have been his impending future. And now the prophecy will realize. He's going to rot in jail for the rest of his miserable life, now that he was trying to do better, to be better.

Yeah, life is fucking hilarious.

“WHERE IS HE?!”

Max storms into the police station, spreading pure intense fury. She is flushed and on her face there’s something that can be defined as a homicidal look. All the policemen turn to her, alarmed by a sudden display of anger.

She’s breathing hard through her nostril, looking almost similar to her stepbrother in his worst moments. El and Steve are next to her, and they definitely share her same mind set.
A man appears in front of her. He’s a tall, colored man on his forty with a stern look on his face. He scrutinizes her from top to bottom, his hands on his hips in a severe gesture.
“Calm down, young lady.” he spats. “Why don’t you start by telling me who are you referring to?” Max rolls her eyes, already pissed off. “Yeah, I suppose you keep a lot of different people every day in this station.” the officer raises a brow, perplexed.

“Billy! I’m talking about Billy Hargrove, who else?!” she yells next, her patience dangerously near the limit.

The man nods, pensive. “I see. And you are…?”
“Max Mayfield. I’m his sister!”

El makes a step ahead. “…And I’m his friend.” she adds, resolute, then, Steve’s turn follows. “…And I’m his… friend. Too.” he says, this time with a certain amount of uncertainty.

The officer takes some sweet time to think, studying the bizarre trio. Then, he stops his gaze on El and snaps, all of a sudden. “Wait a minute… you’re Hop’s daughter, aren’t you?!” El nods but doesn’t say anything back. There are more important things to think of at the moment.

The officer rubs a hand on his chin, slightly surprised. “Jesus…” he hisses. “How come you’re friend with Hargrove? That doesn’t make any sense.” Max answers for her, stomping her feet on the floor, impatient. “That’s not fucking relevant, is it?!” at this outburst, the

man points an inquisitive finger towards her. “Ehy! Watch your language, young lady!” this reproach has the power to make Max even more upset, if possible.

“Ok, ok… why don’t we all calm down a little and take this into my office?” he proposes, and even if Max doesn’t really give a shit about *calm down* or talking in the policeman’s office, she has to play it cool and follow the rules.

They find themselves seated in front of the man’s desk. He introduces himself as officer Powell and claims that he was a dear friend of Hopper. Max just wishes that being with El could just give them a little bit of advance, considering Powell’s friendship with her dad.

But Powell seems adamant.

“I’m sorry, kid, you can’t see him. He’s under custody. There will be a trial. He has a record, and the other kid is badly beaten, we can’t close an eye this time.” He explains, sighing.

“He has a record?” Max repeats instinctively, dumbfounded. There are so many things that she doesn’t know about her brother… he’s pretty much still a big mystery for her.

The officer sighs again and reaches for a paper on his desk. “Well, this should be confidential, but since you all claim to be his friends… or relatives, whatever.” he clears his voice and starts to read the paper. “Underage drinking. Illicit possession of Marijuana. Illicit possession of a switchblade knife. Suspected bike stealing…” at this, Steve snorts, not able to keep back his amusement. Everyone glares at him. Officer Powell gives him a stern look, then, he resumes the reading. “…Street drunkenness, and a very nasty list of speeding tickets.” he slams the paper on the desk after finishing the reading. “I don’t know how to tell you, but… we knew already the subject. We suspected that the kid was going to beat someone. So, giving the circumstances… I think that he is, sorry for being this brutally honest, fucked.”

A heavy silence follows. Max is mute. She doesn’t know what to say, that’s just so fucking unfair. Billy doesn’t deserve this, he’s not that type of guy anymore! Well, maybe he hasn’t stopped doing illicit

stuff, but he's not violent. He's way better than that and he can't even prove it!

"I already called his… your dad." officer Powell announces, correcting himself last minute. Max snaps on her seat. "You didn't have to do that!" the man gives her a wary glance. Max clears her voice. "You don't understand… his father… he beats him, he beats him so bad! He will kill him!"

"Well, I don't think he will, considering that the kid is behind the bars. And, however, having a violent father is not sufficient to justify a similar behavior, he's eighteen, he must take responsibilities for his ac…"

"He didn't do it." El interrupts him. Everyone's eyes dart at her.
"I beg your pardon?"

"He didn't do it." she repeats, firmly. The officer looks at her with his brows frowned, searching for a lie in her look. She keeps eye-contact without flinching.
"I'm sorry, kid. Have you seen Robinson's face? Because I think the boy will need plastic surgery. Lucky that his parents are loaded, but…" "He. Didn't. Do. It." El hisses, venomous. Now she looks pissed, and a pissed El could be dangerous, but also really effective. Max looks at her with curiosity. But the officer doesn't seem affected at all by her confidence.
"Kid… you're telling me, right, that the boy just… smashed his head on the roof of a car by himself? Like in some sort of… crazy meltdown?"

El nods. "This is exactly how things went. We can all testify."
Another heavy pause of silence follows by. Officer Powell is staring at her, trying to decipher which game she's playing at. He speaks after something that feels like an eternity.
"So… Chris Robinsons hits his head and ruins his face on his own will… to… frame Billy?"

El nods again but doesn't add anything.
"Why?" the man urges, now sounding totally confused.
"Because he hates Billy!" Max yells. Maybe El's strategy is working, at least the policeman is listening to them, now.

“And why does he hate him?”

…Or maybe not. The officer still doesn’t seem really convinced, after all… Max has to step up to the plate and take control of the situation. She’s good at lying, she can do it.
“Because… Billy stole his girlfriend. And he’s furious. But also a coward, he knows that Billy can kick his ass with his eyes closed, so he made up the plan just to get him arrested.”

This time looks like the man is thinking about it. He scratches his chin, absently. Max shares a complicit look with Steve and El, preying inside her mind that this will work out properly. Yeah, she’s perfectly aware that is sounds simply delirious. The idea of a guy who can be so psycho to literally almost kill himself just to send the ass of someone to jail is a little too much, but they must insist on putting up that version of the story. After all, the truth is even stranger, isn’t it? Billy has been possessed by an interdimensional monster and has inherited crazy mind-control powers as a consequence of it, and he can’t control them properly when he gets too emotional. Well, clearly the story of Chris Robinson banging his head on a roof of a car in order to frame Billy sounds more plausible.

After what is felt like an eternity, Powell declares the verdict.
“Well… if what you’re telling me is real, miss Mayfield, you will have to prove it. Bring witnesses, other than you.”

Max blinks in shock. “Witnesses?” she repeats, dumbly.
“Yeah, correct. Now, if you don’t mind, I got work to do…”

It’s a kind invitation to fuck off. So, they do as they have been told. It’s not that they have a lack of things to do: they need to find witnesses. To prove Billy’s innocence. It’s a matter of life and death.

Notes for the Chapter:

> I google 80s Arcade games and I picked one completely random for the first scene ahaha honestly I really know nothing about it.

22. All the rage back home

Notes for the Chapter:

> Almost done!
>
> I've almost completed the story, even if the chapters need hella editing. It's good because, I dunno, I really wanted to finish it. I've started writing it in the middle of a new, heavy lockdown where I was freaking out. My brain must find something where to converge my energies.
>
> I have never written a fanfiction, none less one in English!
>
> In the beginning, I was there like, WTF are you doing Blu, you're not that pro in English to write stuff as an author, you're making a fool of yourself. Then I thought, you know what? Whatever. Better not to take myself too seriously, I like doing it, and I really hope that there are people who are having fun too in reading my trash....

To say that Robin was surprised to receive the call is reductive.

Nope, Robin was actually *shocked* in hearing how frightened Steve's voice has sounded.

It was a lazy day at Family Video, nothing in particular was bothering what appeared like an absolutely average afternoon. It was just her and Keith in the store, and she was even able to do her homework due to the lack of presence of too many customers. So, she was sitting at the counter, scribbling absently on her notes, when the phone rang.

Initially, she has just reached the handset with a listless movement, answering flatly the standard response: "Family Video. You're talking with Robin, how can I help you?", prefiguring someone on the other side of the line who surely wanted to complain about something,

maybe the lack of their favorite movie in the store or a suggestion about a new order of romantic comedies. Yeah, nothing strange, nothing new. Except that she hadn't found a whining customer, she had found none of less than Steve The Hair Harrington begging her to join him at his place in the middle of something that sounded like a meltdown.

She has answered with a low voice, careful not to be heard by her manager, who was busy organizing tapes in a shelf not far away.

"Steve… I'm working, if you haven't noticed. How the hell should I do that?!"

On the other side of the line, Steve has sighed in stress. "Come on, Rob! Since when making up a cover is a problem for you?! This is code red. I swear, I'm serious, code fucking red, dude!"

"Fine!" she has hissed. "I will be there in ten minutes. See ya." "Rob! You're the best! You're really t…" but the dork couldn't have continued his lick-ass flattering because Robin had already ended the call.

So, here she is. Looking at her boss and questioning herself how she's going to solve this.
She sighs, collecting all the mental strength, and stalks towards him with her fists clenched.

I hope this will work… and I also hope that dork is serious about the code red thing. If he's going to ask me again about gay porn I'm going to fucking kill him.
"Keith!" the boy turns to her with his usual annoyed face, waiting for her to talk. Robin finds herself nervous and out of words, but just for a moment. She speaks with a loud voice, putting up an extremely convincing act.

"My granny is dying."

Keith just raises a brow, perplexed. "She's dying?" he repeats, poker-face. Robin nods with too much energy. "Yeah, she's in the hospital. She had a heart attack, it's critical…"

Then, Robin tries to look like someone on the verge to cry. “I need to see her before she passes out. Please, Keith! She’s everything that I have. I grew up with her…” obviously it is all a lie since she has still all her grannies and also, she never grew up with them, considering that one of them is actually in Galway aka Ireland. But, whatever.

Keith studies her without saying a thing while she starts to feel nervous under his gaze. Then, after something that feels like an eternity, he tells the verdict.

“I don’t think your grandma is really dying.” Robin tries to replay but he dismisses her with a wave of the hand. “…But I do think that is an emergency. So, you can go.” Yes! She tries to contain the enthusiasm, only to realize that Keith hasn’t finished talking yet. He’s about to put up his conditions for the generous concession. Son of a…

“Ok. What you want back?” she spats, putting her hands on her hips.

“Your friend… the red-head.” Robin tries not to flinch at the mention of her. She nods slightly. “Yeah, what about her?” “I want you to introduce me to her.” eeew. Poor Liz. She’s gonna be so embarrassed… “She’s hot.” Keith adds then, as a matter of fact, and yes, it’s true, she’s fucking hot but she’s also Robin’s property. Anyway, it’s not that the guy has a possibility.

“Fine!” Robin spits on her hand and reaches it to Keith who does the same.

“We have a deal. Can I go now? It’s really, really important. Please.” the guy makes an almost imperceptible nod in response, giving her the ‘permission’ to get the fuck out of there. She hastily collects her stuff and rushes to her scooter which is parked next to the main door of the store. The drive to Steve’s house is almost a rally. She said ten minutes. It will be ten minutes.

She has a strange nervous feeling about that situation, like an omen. Something happened, something really, really bad. Her mind goes to Billy, without any particular reason.
She sighs while driving with the thick cold wind that whips her hair.

I really hope that dumbass is ok… she thinks, picturing in her head all

the worst possible scenarios.

She finds all the gang at Steve's place. They all look upset and distressed and Robin instantly absorbs their state of mind by reflex.

"What happened?" she asks, almost a whisper. Steve is sitting at the big, dining table with a dark expression on his face. He looks about to cry. Robin can't stand the sight; she approaches him and gently squeezes his shoulder, trying to be soothing. "Hey, it's going to be ok…" she finds herself saying, dumbly. Steve sighs and finally lifts his gaze to her.

"They got him arrested."
Shit.
"Billy? Why?"

Steve doesn't respond. He just continues to stare at her, even if his eyes look empty; he isn't really watching in her direction, he's in another dimension. Robin tightens the grip on the shoulder. "Steve. What happened?"

It's Dustin who answers for him. He's seated next to him at the table. "He almost killed a dude." "Almost!" Max interjects, feeling the urge to point it out. Dustin rolls his eyes.
"Max, you saw the scene! That was madness, the guy is going to have his face fixed up by plastic surgery! He didn't have any teeth left; it was creepy!" "He didn't do it on purpose, and you know that!" Max yells that while snapping on her feet and dragging the chair with her. Now is Mike's turn to intervene. "Come on, Max! Even if it were true, Billy is dangerous, and he has proven it a lot of times! What else do you need to know? Next time could be one of us! The guy has a temper, and he can't control his power!"

Predictably, they all start to yell at each other. Figures. Steve stays silent, hugging himself, looking shattered. Robin pinches the bridge of her nose and decides that she must step up to the plate to resolve the situation.

"SHUT THE FUCK UP, EVERYBODY!"

The shouting has been effective; everyone gets mute. Fucking finally.

“Ok, why don’t you start with telling me what the fuck happened?” she exhales, tired. The brats share some apprehensive gaze, then, Max speaks up.

Turns out that Robin isn’t too surprised to discover that Robinson is involved. It looks like an accident, but still, it doesn’t change the gravity of the situation. Billy has almost killed someone, and he can potentially rot in jail for that. Robin collects her thoughts, hooking her fingers to her hair and walking nervously around Steve’s big living room.
“We need to get the witnesses. Who was there with Chris?” the only one able to answer the question is Steve. “One of them I think is a junior… the other one was in the team with me the previous year. Name’s Terry Jackson.” “Do you know where he lives?” she inquires, receiving a shrug in response. “How the hell should I know, Rob?”

Robin sighs and massages her temples. “Ok. I guess we can figure it out. This town is not that big… we should start with making some phone calls and ask around.”
Everybody agrees. It sounds like a good plan, and it’s the only one that they have.
“Mike, call your sister. We will need all the help we can get.” Robin orders the kid, who grimaces in annoyance, evidently not used to being commanded by someone else. Then, she points to Will. “Same goes for your mother.” he nods.

“El.” she says to the girl, suddenly attentive. “I think you should check up on Billy… see how he’s doing.” “I want to be there.” Steve snaps on his feet, looking resolute at the kid. “Me too!” Max joins them and, after sharing a last complicit glance, they disappear in another room.

Mike is already calling at home, looking for his sister, a sign that they all understood that the situation is serious, and they must move their asses. Robin guesses that’s good.
Make it work. Make it fucking work. she pleads, internally, biting the side of her cheek.

“I’ve found him.” El declares, flat-voice, while a trickle of blood starts dripping from her nostril.

She’s seated on the center of the bed with her blindfold on and Steve and Max to her side. “How is he?!” Max asks, frantically.
“He’s sitting on a cot, looking at nothing. He’s got a blanket on his shoulders. He’s… shaking.”

Steve sighs at those words, repressing the urge to cry like a baby right at that moment. He wants to say something, but his mouth feels dry, and also, everything sounds fucking stupid. Max speaks for him. “Tell him that everything is going to be ok. That we already worked out how to solve this.” Max’s voice is cracked, and she looks about to burst too. At least Steve is not alone.

“I don’t think he believes that…” El says. Max can’t help it; she moves a hand to her mouth and starts to sob uncontrollably. Steve gulps and finally decides to speak.
“Tell him to trust us. We’re going to make it up. Everything is going to be alright; he just needs to be a little patient and keep holding on.”
El nods. Some seconds of heavy silence follow, a sign that the girl is talking in the void.

Steve can’t hold back his tongue from saying what comes next.
“Tell him that it will be over soon. Tell him that I love him.”

Max gasps in surprise, her face streaked with tears. Steve ignores her: his eyes are pointed on El, while he waits impatiently for her response. Billy will be pissed to hear that. He will be pissed to have his private stuff told to the four winds. He’s sure he’s gonna say a sly remark back, maybe telling him to fuck off, that he’s a bleeding heart or something.
But what comes next from El’s mouth has the power to break him completely.

“He says that he knows. And he loves you too.”
That’s it. Steve can’t hold back his tears anymore. He burst into a loud sob and rushes outside the room, feeling the air lacking in his lungs. He storms out to the porch, breathing raggedly and gripping his hair in desperation.

He can't stop picturing Billy, alone in his cell, scared to death and cold. Imagine that scene literally breaks his heart into thousands of pieces. How did it happen? One moment they were flirting and joking, as usual, speaking about being to each other's ass, and then, the next one, he sees Robinson's face broken and Billy freaking out in the vain attempt to control his power.

It happened all so fast.

Of one thing he's sure, after all this, Steve is not gonna leave Billy alone for a minute. He's going to be glued to the boy, he's going to lock him somewhere if it will be necessary to protect him. He's going to do anything, anything to keep him safe.

His hands are shaking when he lights up a cigarette. He must do two attempts. He's so focused on his deep thoughts that he doesn't even hear Robin arriving at his back.
"Dingus." her voice startles him. Steve looks up at his friend, hastily weeping his tears with the back of his hand. She has a heavy apprehensive gaze that looks almost foreign on her features.
"Ehy… Rob." Steve's voice is cracked from the cry. "How is he?" she inquires. He swallows and diverts his gaze, it's just simply too much to bear.
"Alone. In a cold room." he tells that almost in a sneer. How the fuck should he be, after all? That's just a rhetorical question, isn't it?
Robin sighs and rubs her arm, awkwardly. "He just needs to hold on a little more… Nancy and Jonathan are on their way. We're gonna get the address of the guy and force him to witness for Billy, explaining this big misunderstanding."

Steve nods, absently, and blows out some smoke. He wants to trust her, he wants to believe that this is going to work out fine, but his mind has blurry thoughts and cannot avoid pessimism.

"It's just…" he starts, after a while, still not looking at Robin. His voice trails off. "…I can't stop thinking how he must feel lonely, and frightened… El said he was trembling, Rob. He… he fucking hates cold, and humidity! I guess his cell is damp. Such an idiot, why does he never dress up properly?! He always needs to act like a goddamn peacock, he's going to freeze his ass sooner or later." he's babbling, overtalking due to his delirious mental state. Robin makes a face.

“So, well, the next thing you can do after all this shit will be over is to give him a sweater, as a present.”

Steve gasps, while his cigarette is burning by itself, momentarily forgotten. “A sweater?” Robin nods. “Yeah, why not? He will be forced to wear it because it’s a present. And you will be calmer, knowing that he’s not feeling cold.”

Steve thinks that he’s getting what Robin is doing. She’s trying to distract him, following the flow of his bursting thoughts. Well… she’s kinda succeeding in it. Clever girl, as usual.
Steve laughs and finally takes a drag from the almost burnt cigarette. “I don’t know if he would wear it. He’s not that considerate.” Robin chuckles too. “Yeah, maybe you’re right. Maybe he would just tell you to fuck off.” “He would probably call me momma Steve or something. Maybe adding a few dirty, extremely perturbing jokes about fucking moms.”
They burst into laughter, now suddenly lighten up.

After some time passed just in getting back their breath, Robin squeezes Steve’s shoulder.
“We’re going to get him out of that cell. I promise. Jesus, Steve. We have fought Demogorgons and crazy evil Russians, this is nothing compared to it.”
Steve lets out a tired laugh. “Yeah. You made a point.”

With the arrival of Nancy and Jonathan and their participation as detectives, it’s not after much that they have an address.

They leave all the kids in Steve’s house and jump in the Beemer, destination: Terry Jackson’s place. Steve drives fast, clenching tight the steering wheel and glaring at the road ahead of him. They have an absurd plan to accomplish, but it must work. There’s no plan B or C. Well, it could be, actually… they could always ask El to throw down Billy’s cellar door, but that would force him to live as a fugitive for the rest of his life. So, they need to play it clean.

“That one!” Robin points at a precise small townhouse, making Steve break violently, under everyone’s complaints. He runs to the door, not even caring to close the door of his car behind him and starts to

ring the bell like a maniac. The house looks pretty average, except for the fact that even the outside walls are full of crosses and catholic saints' pictures. Steve can't even imagine how it must look on the inside.

After not much time, Robin, Nancy and Jonathan reach him and the door of the house opens. Luckily, it's Terry Jackson himself, who can't help but gasps in surprise at the sight of the uninvited visitors.

"What the heck…"
"You have to testify for Billy." Steve spats, not caring to explain anything more to the boy, who furrows his brows in confusion. "What?!" "Billy. He didn't touch Robinson and you know that!" Steve pokes the guy's chest, making him flinch in response.

Terry Jackson is the classic example of the pathetic sheep, the type of person that, taken without his gang, can transform into a weak and jittery creature. *Like Tommy H*, Steve finds himself thinking.

Yeah, it is Robinson the real mind behind that pathetic group of bullies, he is the one in charge. So, Terry Jackson will be obviously loyal to his leader, but perhaps they can exploit the fact that he must be basically a malleable person, a one who goes with the flow.

"I don't know what I saw!" Terry yells, now looking vaguely upset. Steve and the others share glances, while the boy speaks again, voice stuttering and shaky. "That was… nuts. Chris looked possessed and Hargrove… I don't know! That blood on his nose… it looked like he was responsible for whatever the fuck Chris was doing! Then, the kid… I don't fucking know what I saw, it seemed like everyone had got mad!"

Nancy takes a step ahead and talks firmly to the guy. "You saw nothing, Jackson. Nothing. Chris Robinson hurt himself in order to frame Billy, because he's crazy. This is how things went."

Terry groans, squirming on his spot. He looks ready to bolt. They hear Terry's mother calling him from inside the house, so he closes the door and makes a few nervous steps towards the porch, followed by everyone else.

“You know what I think, Wheeler?” he says to the girl. “I think that’s pure bullshit. But I don’t care, I don’t wanna be involved in your satanic freaky mind power. This shit freaks me out, seriously.”

They all share another long, perplexed, glance. Satanic mind power? Jesus, this guy is an idiot. How could anyone believe something so stupid?!

“Jackson.” this time is Robin to give it a try, approaching the guy with firmness. “Billy is going to rot in jail because of Robinson. And I know you don’t give a shit, I also know that Robinson scares you shitless, but for once in your life, do the right thing. He doesn’t deserve this.”

Terry scoffs. “You goddamn right about that, Buckley. I don’t give a shit about that fa…” his voice trails off at the sight of Steve’s and Jonathan’s best menacing auras. He clears his voice. “And I’m not scared of Chris. It’s just… I don’t want to be involved in your freaky shit. That’s it.”

Steve is about to panic. He knew that it wasn’t going to work, Robin had made it too simple. He looks at his friend, desperately searching for a foothold. In the end, he finds it in Nancy, who talks with the nastiest look on her face.

“But you will. Be involved. If you won’t help us.”

Everybody looks at her in surprise. What game is she playing now? Sure she has thought about a solution, and the girl can elaborate goddamn crazy plans when she wants. Between crazy and ingenious; Steve almost fear her.

“You’re right about that, Jackson. We’re part of a satanic sect. What you saw… it’s nothing, nothing compared to what could happen if you decide not to testify for Billy.” at this not too veiled threat, Terry flinches, suddenly scared like a little lamb. Bingo! Looks like Nancy really knows how to hit the sore spots. Clever girl, as usual. Steve wonders who would win in an intelligence competition between her and Robin. They seem pretty much at the same level.

Nancy continues, getting nearer to the boy, talking in a whisper, face

blank and motionless. "…You know, we really can't afford to be uncovered from the police. We need Billy out of there, and we need it now. So… will you help us?"

Damn, it's working. How the hell did Nancy know about how much a story like that could have afflicted that dumbass?! Terry Jackson is now shaking pathetically. He wipes his sweated front and just exhales with a broken voice: "Please don't take my dog!" Steve must repress the urge to laugh at that. The boy looks frightened. He mumbles something between his teeth, something that sounds like "I always knew Hargrove was a Satanist… that music… that music doesn't leave any trace of doubt", while Robin grips his bicep and starts to drag him to the car.

It's done: they got him! Even if Steve finds it hard to believe, considering *how* they managed to convince him, but, whatever. The most important thing is the result, isn't it?

Jonathan elbows Nancy. "Seriously? We are a satanic cult now?!" he tells her while they're far enough to avoid being heard. Nancy rolls her eyes at that and just gives a small shrug. "Improvisation. You got any better ideas?"

They get in the car and Steve resumes the crazy driving, destination: the police station. Terry Jackson is trapped on the backseats between Robin and Jonathan, he moves his eyes frantically from them to Steve, scanning the surrounding environment like a cornered animal. Steve might even feel pity for the guy, but not now. Now there's one thing he can think of, and nothing else.

This time he has an itching sensation on his hands, something that charges him with some sort of ferine adrenaline. They're going to do it. They're going to make it.

El's visit in the void has given him a vague light of hope that goes extinguished as soon as he realizes that he's still alone in that cold, dump cell.

Must be evening outside, but he can't tell, there are no windows in the small cubicle and the only light is a feeble light bulb that is

dangling from the ceiling. He hugs himself tighter, feeling the most pathetic human being in the universe. He wishes he knew how Steve feels about that situation, if he's mad at him or not. He almost killed a man, after all. That's something. He remembers the nasty glares of the brats before he got arrested, but then… El has said that Steve has told her to tell him that he loves him, so at least this hasn't changed, has it? Steve has also said that everything is going to be ok… that they will figure out something. However, Billy can't think about anything good at that moment. His mind is crushed by the heaviness caused by the idea that he won't be able to see Steve anymore, that he will rot in jail for the rest of his life. There's no space for futile hope, just the desperate surrender of a certainty.

To add more damage, he hears the officer saying that he's got a visitor, who can only be one person…

The door opens, making the fuming figure of Neil appearing on the threshold.

He gasps in fear and clenches the blanket, making himself smaller in the corner of the cot.

"Five minutes." announces the officer, disappearing behind Neil but leaving the door open.

His father glares at him for at least something like thirty seconds, then, he growls with the most venomous voice of the repertory. "Look at you. You're pathetic." He's scanning Billy from the top to bottom like he's a cockroach, scum of the earth.

I know. Billy would say, but for some strange reason, he decides that the best option is to shut up and let the grown up speak.

"I always knew you were going to be arrested." Neil snarls, making few steps towards him. "Beating a guy almost to death… you're out of your fucking mind, boy." Billy mumbles back a response, but it's too low to be heard. Neil tilts his head. "Excuse me? I can't hear you. And fucking look at me when I'm speaking, boy!" then, to enforce the concept, he grips Billy's chin, forcing him to look at his ferine blue eyes. Billy gulps and talks, this time adding some volume to his voice.

“I didn’t do it. I didn’t touch him.”

Neil glares at him, silent, breathing raggedly through his nostrils. In other circumstances, he would have already beat the shit out of his son, but here there are policemen nearby so he must behave.

“It’s not my fault.” Billy adds, with courage he didn’t even know he had. Neil scoffs. “No, of course it’s not. Never taking your responsibilities, aren’t you?”

Billy grits his teeth and shoves his father’s grip away, making him widen his eyes in surprise. Last time he reacted to Neil’s violence with some attitude he has got the greatest beating since he had been caught with Nathan by his parent himself. But now things are different.

He’s got nothing to lose. He’s desperate. And desperation creates new possibilities, sometimes.
He clenches his fists and challenges his father’s glance.
He has nothing to lose. He’s already dead.

“I didn’t beat him. But even if I did, whose fault do you think it is, huh?!” his voice has raised in volume, while Neil instinctively draws back, suddenly speechless. Billy continues, he feels angry and miserable and he can’t stop now.

“You beat me since when I was a child, dad. I had to learn how to hide the bruises in school, you fucking sent me to the hospital once!” he has snapped on his feet, forgetting the blanket that has fallen behind his back. Neil takes just a moment to recover from the odd behavior of his son, then, he burst into pure rage. “You forgot that it happened because I caught you whoring around with the son of a fuckin politician, boy! I didn’t punish you for no reason. I was educating you.”

Billy makes an ugly laugh, because, seriously, that’s hilarious. “Educating me?” he spats, venomous, bringing his palms to his chest. “With what?! With fists and kicks?! Yelling at me, telling me that I’m a failure, that I’m a fag, *humiliating* me?! Is that your idea of education, old-man?!”

“I don’t accept discussions on my ways, you little insolent shit!” Neil screams into his face, spitting droplets of saliva in doing it. “I do what I do because it’s my job to care about making a man out of you and it’s your job to obey me!”

Billy scoffs and diverts the gaze. “Yeah. Like you cared with my mother.”

Now, a heavy silence follows. Neil is just breathing raggedly, furious, out of his mind. He gasps, moving his mouth to say something and then interrupting himself. Billy takes it as a sign of weakness, so he decides to take advantage of it.

“You used to beat her. To insult her too. Then she left you. Looks like your ‘educational methods’ aren’t the smartest one, eh, old-man?” Billy hisses that and pokes Neil’s chest, who makes a step back. He has an absurd expression that Billy has never seen on him. In his frown, there’s something that vaguely resembles fear. He hit a sore spot.

“She abandoned you. And me.” Billy inhales sharply, ready for the next, heavy words. “AND WHOSE FAULT IS THAT, EH?!” he yells into his father’s face, finding pure satisfaction in doing it. Neil doesn’t say a word, he just stands there, silent, eyes widened in shock and mouth parted.

Billy gets even closer to him and snarls with pure, intense, hatred.
“Take your fucking responsibilities, old-man.”

There’s just other silence. Heavy and dense silence, full of unspoken truths. After something that feels like an eternity, Neil twists and storms out to the cell, leaving Billy alone with his thoughts again.

He curses through his teeth and walks back to his cot, grabbing the fallen blanket from the ground. After not much time, he hears the sound of the door being closed by a policeman.

He feels dry, completely emptied from every emotion. He had always wanted to tell those stuff to his father, but now that he managed to do so he finds himself out of any satisfaction. There’s no space left for fear or rage either, he’s just a drained container, a meat puppet.

It has been satisfying. When he had yelled into that repulsive man's face, Billy has felt power. Seeing him out of words, seeing him… scared. Damn, that has been priceless. But it had been a volatile pleasure, now already burned out completely, leaving space just for a new, thick and heavy emptiness.

He doesn't even react when he hears the door opening again, after a few hours. He's too tired, too tired to care about anything.
He's staring absently at the ground like a ghost of himself. With the corner of his eye, he can glimpse the presence of two men in front of him. They're talking, maybe to him, he doesn't know, doesn't care. Nothing seems important anymore.

He's dead, he's already dead, after all.

He lifts his gaze only to realize that they aren't Hawkins's police officers. They have a different uniform, they look like army men, as their nasty machine guns can also prove. One of them points a gun at him, he doesn't flinch, doesn't react. Screw this. Is he going to die alone in that shithole?

What a miserable way to go. He almost wants to laugh at them.

Yeah, shoot me! Whatever. Go on, be my guest.

He does.

A sharp pain hits his left arm. He moves his eyes to the point where the ache comes from to realize that there is a dart on his forearm. A fucking dart. The types that you use to sedate elephants. It's not the first time, isn't it? So, those bad guys aren't intentioned to kill him. They want to kidnap him.

And it's ironic, it's fucking ironic because he should be the top-grade expert in abductions, since he had some experiences in the matter. Yeah, it's hilarious, fucking comical. Him, being kidnapped. Can you believe that?!

He grins while he falls down to the ground with a loud thud. His senses quickly faint, and then, there's only blackness. And void.

23. War pigs

Notes for the Chapter:

> Mh.... I don't like this chapter that much. I know, too many things are happening! It's just my mind that is a vulcano of ideas.
>
> Disclaimer: dark stuff in here. Non-consensual drug use & physical restrictions. Poor Billy. It's always him, I'm sadistic, apparently. Ah, also a lot of sexist language but that's perfectly normal if you arrived here.
>
> Fun fact: this is the third chapter with a Black Sabbath's song for the title ahahah
>
> It's good that I have the story almost finished because I don't have much free time in these days... I'm starting to write my thesis for uni, so, adult responsabilities and so on :(

The first thing they notice at the police station is that the place is silent. Too silent. Steve is no expert in the matter, but he’s pretty sure it isn’t normal.

A visceral sense of fear starts to rise in his mind while they’re walking carefully through the entrance, and he finds himself regretting not to have his bat with him. Something happened there, nothing good, that’s for sure.

“Hellooo? Anyone here?” he calls, not receiving any answer. He shares a wary glance with the others, it seems like they’re thinking the same as him. They gasp in shock when they find out the first officer laying motionless on the floor. Terry Jackson screams, literally freaking the hell out, while Nancy precipitates to check the pulse of the man, kneeling next to him.

“He’s alive!” she announces, causing a sigh of relief in everyone. Jonathan crouches down next to her and examines the unconscious

man with his sight, pensively. “He’s been sedated.” he points at the dart in the officer’s neck while saying that.

Steve huffs and grips his hair in stress. “No good, no good, no good!” he mutters, walking around in a circle, desperately. Whatever it is, it must concern evil Russian or crazy secret American agents. Honestly, Steve doesn’t even know which could be worse.

“Let’s check the others!” Nancy proposes, practical, jumping on her feet. Everyone agrees, but at that moment, they realize they’re not alone; Terry Jackson is there with them and he’s not really inclined to follow Nancy’s directives. The boy makes a few steps back, trembling in fear. Steve can’t blame him, honestly, it’s pretty fucked up and the guy is not used to that kind of situation.

Yeah, kinda funny how you can get used to this freaky shit. Monsters? Demogorgons? Secret American agents? Hawkins’ regular adventures. But not for this guy, this guy is an average teenager whose life’s path had casually crossed theirs.

His voice comes out cracked and shaky. “What… what the fuck is going on…” he stutters, eyes wide. Steve just shrugs in response. “That’s what we’re trying to figure out here, man.” Honestly? He doesn’t want to reassure this little guy, telling him that everything is ok and to try to stay calm. It’s just wasted breath.

“YOU GUYS ARE FREAKS!!” Terry yells, pointing a finger towards them which makes Robin’s eyes roll back by default. “Jeez, this one is loud.” she spats, annoyed.
“WHATEVER FREAKY SHIT YOU’RE INVOLVED IN, I DON’T WANT TO BE PART OF THIS!” he continues. Then, without adding a thing, he springs on his feet toward the exit, leaving them dumbfounded on their spot.

Well… that wasn’t exactly expected.

Robin clears her voice and points a thumb to the point where the guy has just disappeared. “Should we chase him… or…?” Nope. Not worth it. “Screw him!” Steve exclaims, in a perfect imitation of Billy’s automatic responses, finding the approval of his friends in their looks.

“There’s no time for this. We have other priorities!” “Steve’s right.” Nancy convenes. “Besides, I think we will be able to convince him a second time when we will need it.” “Yeah, the guy looks pretty influenceable.” Jonathan points out.

Maybe they’re right, but still, the plan to convince a guy to testify for Billy just by intimidating him with a clearly too made-up story about they being a satanic sect sounds really volatile. Like they’re walking on a fragile, thin line that can easily crush and disrupt everything else. Well, they’ll figure out a solution, all in good time.

They resume their path through the police station, finding out two more officers stunned with sleep darts. When they finally arrive at the cell where Billy was placed, they find it empty. Well, it was pretty obvious, after all, but Steve can’t help but feel the grip of pain and anxiety in his throat. Billy is gone. Someone has kidnapped him, sociopathic Russians or American military men. They will use him as a rat-lab, they will keep him imprisoned between four thick walls and do all the kinds of crazy experiments as they did with El.
He absently grabs the blanket from the floor and twists it through his fingers. He’s ahead of everyone, so the others stand awkwardly behind his back, waiting for him to say something. The first one to break the silence is Nancy who approaches him carefully and gently squeezes his shoulder.

“Steve…” she whispers, giving him an apologetic look. Steve talks almost to himself, ignoring her and her touch.

“Here’s what we’re gonna do.” he announces, with a firmness that sounds foreign in him. “We’re going to get back to my place, ask El to find him. Then, we’re going to rescue him. Whatever means require, whatever effort… we’re going to do that. We’re going to break in whatever fucking lab he is, grab his sorry ass and get him back here, in Hawkins.”
He can’t see the other’s faces but can feel their hesitation in the air. Nancy moves her hand away and sighs. “Steve…” she says, with an apprehensive voice that is usually used with children. It’s almost… irritating.

“We can’t just… barge in a secret lab. I know, I know you already did that with Robin in the past, but… we can’t afford to come

unprepared. We need a plan, a solid one."
She has a point; Steve can't deny that. But still, every minute they pass there talking is a minute added to Billy's distress. They don't know who his abductors are or what they're doing to him, but Steve doesn't even want to start that train of thoughts. Nope, there's no time to lose.

He twists to face her, suddenly feeling the crackling heat of anger rising up. "And what?! We discuss a plan sitting at the table, while they could be doing anything to him?!" he yells to her face, making her flinch. "Those people… those people don't know any respect for human life! You know what they did to El. They have no scruples, no mercy, no humanity!" his voice gradually lowers, sounding more and more tired and less venomous. He's scared, he's goddamn scared and he can't hide it.

Nancy gasps like a fish, searching for the right answer in her mind. It's Jonathan who intervenes and talks to her place. "Nancy is right, we need a plan. And help, help from someone that has experience." Steve must repress the urge of rolling his eyes. Of course Jonathan agrees with Nancy, as fucking usual! However, he realizes then that the boy hasn't finished talking yet.

"Murray." he exhales, as if a single name could explain everything and well, to be honest, it's pretty much like it. Steve blinks, opens his mouth to say something and closes it again, suddenly out of objections. After a few infinite seconds, he can't help but agree with Jonathan's idea. Maybe Murray, with the help of Joyce, is the man that can do for them. And perhaps… to break into a secret lab without any kind of plan is not the brightest idea. Yeah, perhaps they're right.

"Ok. Good, you should go get him." he declares, in the end, sighing and running a hand to his hair. Jonathan nods. "Leave it to us." "Uhm… excuse me." Robin intervenes. "Could anyone tell me who the hell is this Murray, now…?" they all look at her like she's some kind of idiot, then, Nancy answers her legitimate question. "Basically, a conspiracy theorist freak who lives in a bunker. But he knows his stuff." Robin shrugs. "Well, sounds promising."

They rush to the car, leaving the silent and full of dormant officers

police station behind their back. Steve finds himself stupidly thinking about how Terry Jackson would be probably still running towards home, screaming like a madman, spooked to death. Well, one thing is sure: he can't call the cops, because they're all passed out on a cold floor.

Once they get back in Casa Harrington, Steve notices Joyce's car parked in the yard, a sign that she has joined them already. The sun is down and soon it will be dark, but they can't have rest until the situation is sorted out once for all. Nancy and Jonathan, once jumped off the Beemer, hastily greet them and spring to Jonathan's car. They have a few hours driving ahead of them, and Steve finds himself thinking how much he appreciates their help, and also how guilty he feels for having yelled in Nancy's face in anger. She doesn't deserve his outbursts, she's basically an angel with him. It's just… this situation has literally dragged him into a tornado of emotionality that he can't control.
He will make amend. Eventually. But now, back to business.

Inside the house, the brats are all gathered in the living room. They're obviously screaming while Joyce is trying to calm them. Steve sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose at this scene: what the fuck now?! Why are they all freaking out?!

It's Dustin who precipitates in front of him and grips his biceps, a heavy gaze on his face.

"What?" Steve spats, already annoyed. Dustin bites his lip and glares at him intensively. Suddenly they all get silent in the big living room, and that's kind of creepy, considering how loud the entire lot is, usually. Joyce looks about to cry, El is seated at the table, squeezing Max's shoulder in a gesture of support, while the other kids are on the couch with a heavy look on their faces.

Dustin sighs, taking his sweet time to talk about what seems the reason they all got so upset.
"Billy has been kidnapped." he declares, after a while.

Robin throws her arms in the air with an annoyed grunt. "Well, no shit, dingus!" "What?!" Dustin snaps at her, apparently shocked. "You

knew that?!" "We went to the police station and, obviously, we didn't find him there." Steve briefly explains. Joyce bursts in an overly-dramatic sigh, exclaiming something like 'poor thing!', while the others share perplexed glances.

"What happened?" Lucas inquires. Yeah, what the fuck happened? Difficult to say. Steve runs a hand in the hair in his trade-mark gesture, searching for the right words in his mind. "Well… the police station was full of stunned officers. All sedated with darts." "Evil Russians!" Dustin yells, snapping on his spot. "We don't know if they're Russian!" Mike objects, impertinent as usual.

"They're clearly Russians, Mike, how could it be? El's psycho papa is dead!"
"Yeah, but we don't know if they're Russian, I'm pointing out a matter of fact!"
"That doesn't leave many possibilities, does it?"

"SHUT UP!" Robin shouts, making them be struck dumb instantly. "How do you know that he has been kidnapped?" Steve gives her a curious glare. She has a point; he didn't think about it. How do they know?

It's El who answers, speaking feebly from her seat, eyes pointed on the ground. "I looked for him… in the void." at these words, Steve springs to her and grabs her shoulders, making her flinch at the sudden touch. "You found him?! Is he ok?! How is he?!" El gives him an apologetic look that makes his heart melt. She opens her mouth to speak and trails off, like she doesn't know how to tell what she's about to tell.

"He was… sleeping. In a van. He was… tied. And blindfolded."

Steve gasps and takes a step back, suddenly feeling the urge to cry again. He pictures the morbid image in his mind and he's instantly struck by a wave of panic. Robin perceives that and puts a hand on his shoulder. "We should look for him again in a while. When he will be still in a certain place, so we can get his position." she declares, practical. She's right. Well, she's always right and she always has the best solutions. But still… the image of Billy knocked out and tied, lying on the floor of the back of a van is vivid in Steve's mind and

gives him chills.

He just hopes they won't do anything bad to him, but that's kind of impossible. He hopes that Billy won't be stupid enough to try to resist them and not cooperate with whatever thing they'll ask him to do, because he knows how violent those people can turn.

He wishes Billy will have some sort of self-preservation. His skin is thick, and the guy is pretty resilient, after all.

Don't fucking get killed, dumbass.

He doesn't know where he is, how did he get there or what happened, but one thing is sure: his mind feels like he has been run over by a truck. It's an oddly familiar sensation. After all, it's not the first time he wakes up in a foreign place in a poor physical and mental condition, counting that time where Max did narc him like a fucking animal or his miserable awakening at the Byers' place, just a couple of months before.

He slowly opens his eyes and tries to focus on the environment around him, just to realize that the light is too bright and painfully annoying for his poor corneas. Something like a whine escapes from his mouth, which is surprisingly dry. He makes another attempt, and something begins to take shape in his sight, even if everything is blurry and unbearably luminescent. Whenever he is, it looks like the room of a hospital. Everything is white and bright, too bright. He tries to turn his head slightly to have a better look at the room, but he finds his body quite uncooperative with his commands.

It takes something like minutes, or hours, he doesn't know, to have some of his senses back. For a hospital, that one is a really strange room. Maybe he is in a nuthouse. It's not so unlikely, isn't it? After all, the last memories he recalls are him in a cell, arrested for the almost killing of a boy. Maybe he is some kind of psycho killer, the one that needs serious medical treatment due to his condition.

That makes sense. His mind is floating, stunned. It's like he's continuously shifting from sleep and wakefulness, the border between the thoughts and reality is a thin line. So, he has been drugged.

Maybe he has really gone nuts and now he will have to spend the rest of his life on heavy meds. That would be ironic, wouldn't it? Such a lover of weed, boozes and drugs, forced to be always under some shit into his system. He would laugh if it were possible, but his body doesn't obey him.

After an amount of time that is felt like infinite, someone enters the room. He can hear the sound of a heavy, armored door. Jeez. Isn't it too much? He's not that dangerous, anyway. Maybe those docs are seriously overestimating him.

Someone walks to the corner of the bed (bed? he guesses it is a bed, he hasn't verified it) and drags a chair. Billy can see the person just with the corner of his eye because for some strange reason he can't really move his head to have a better look at him. He's clearly a man in his fifties, dressed sharp with a black suit and white combed hair. Billy tries to speak again, but what comes out of his mouth is just a pathetic moan.

"I'm sorry about this." the man speaks, but his voice hasn't any trace of gentleness. It's cold, and sharp, as the figure of him is. Billy mumbles something back, he doesn't know, he can't understand a shit of what is happening at the moment and who that man is supposed to be. A doctor? A psychiatrist? Clearly the guy went a little too far with the dosage of the meds, because Billy is reduced like a fucking vegetal. Before he can realize it, his body starts to tremble slightly. He's panicking, and he can't move, can't talk, can't do anything.

The man sighs and tuts. "Believe me, I feel sincerely pained in seeing you reduced like this. But you gave us no choice, we had to protect ourselves, do you understand? We still have to know each other before we can decide if you're trustable or not."

Billy finally manages to turn his head and see the men better. He glares at him with every single fiber in his body, wishing he could spit on his face or maybe punch the old-man as he deserves. At that moment, he realizes that not only his body is drugged and out of his control, but he has been tied to sides of the bed too. Jesus fucking Christ! Those people are really scared by him if they're putting all these efforts into keeping him armless.

“With a great power, like yours, Billy, you can be extremely dangerous. But that’s our duty, you see? Make you useful to humankind. You’re not a weapon, boy, you’re… our hope. Our light. You bring us light.”

The fuck is he saying now?! This man is delusional. Is he really a doctor?! He sounds like the one who needs to do a little holiday in the psych ward. Billy squirms on his spot and grunts in anger, glaring daggers at the crazy man who is now smiling at him like a creeper. All the situation, to be honest, is extremely creepy and extremely uncomfortable. He tries again to speak, this time putting all his efforts into formulating real words. They come out cracked and low.

“Who… who…”

The man grins and shifts on the chair. “Oh my, you’re right. How rude of me. I didn’t even introduce myself. My name is Martin Brenner, I am a scientist and I work for the secret service of the USA.”

Billy blinks, trying to realize those words. Secret service?! So, he isn’t in a nuthouse, after all. Suddenly, his last memories resurface in his mind. He has been kidnapped by military men, he has been sedated with a narc and abducted from his cell. So… that means only that those people are the same crazy fellas that had raised El…

As if Brenner is capable of reading minds, he says: “You know Eleven, my daughter. I heard that you guys are quite close, that’s lovely.” As the best that he can in his state, Billy gasps in surprise. He had heard about that guy, he’s the infamous ‘papa’, the psycho that has imprisoned El for years in a lab. Does he want to do the same with him?! Is he the new ‘El’ now?!

Wait a minute. How the fuck does he know about him and El?!

Another time, Brenner smirks and reads his thoughts. “Oh, don’t do that face. I have been watching you, Billy. I needed to keep an eye on you, seeing how you were doing. And, I have to say, I’m impressed. I’m serious, above all the children we grew here, you’re the best one. We have always hoped to create something like you, Billy. El is special, very special. But you…” the man gets closer to him, and Billy

stares into his cold blue eyes, the eyes of a shark. He can't find anything there, just the crazy ambition of someone that uses human beings to reach his goals. "…You're perfect, Billy. You're the one that we were always looking for. You… you're not just an experiment, no. You're a savior, you will save us all." Then, he sniggers. "I'm actually *honored* to make your acquaintance."

Yeah. He's so honored that he has drugged and tied him on the bed. Wow, so fucking flattering.

Billy snorts and shakes his head in the vain attempt to show how contrary he is. It's everything he's got.

Finally, Brenner leans back on the chair and gives him more air to breathe. The proximity with that man wasn't exactly pleasant.

"It's early. I don't expect you to understand, Billy. This is something that goes beyond you… you'll see, eventually. Or maybe never, I don't know. What I do know is that you're precious. Way too precious. We won't let you go."

Billy gulps. He wants to cry, but he hasn't even the energy for that. Brenner sighs, sounding almost tired. "My daughter will try to contact you, I suppose." Those words have the power to awakens a new sense of fear in Billy. "She will try to rescue you. I know she will. And we will welcome her!" Brenner says the last words with fake cheerfulness. Then, he approaches again Billy's face, breathing a few inches from him. "It will be fantastic… to have my daughter back and you, my new child. We will be a great family, Billy, we will create great things." He caresses Billy's cheek, making him squirms and grunts on his spot in a weak protest.

After that, he finally leaves him alone in that bright room.

Billy can't waste any more time. His body is drugged, and his mind is dizzy, but he must do it. He needs to do it. He can't afford to wait for El to look for him, he must be the first one to contact her. So, he closes his eyes and tries to work on his breathing, as El taught him to do. He needs to slow down his breathing and disconnecting from reality, a thing that he will gladly do, considering how shitty reality is, at the moment.

After not much time, he finds himself standing in the void, El's figure seated in front of him. She gasps in surprise at his sight, exclaiming his name. Billy, for a moment, just zoon out looking at his hands and his body. Thank fuck he can move in that dimension! He realizes that he's not wearing his clothes but a white t-shirt and grey sweatpants. El calls his name again, collecting his attention.

"I can move!" Billy stupidly exclaims in enthusiasm, causing perplexity in the kid. "Shit, I can talk too! Oh, thank god… that was horrible!" El approaches him cautiously and squeezes his shoulder. "Billy… what is horrible? Where are you?" Billy blinks at her in surprise. He actually knows that he must look like a madman but he's still too shocked by the previous scene. He needs to gain back some dignity and talk like a sane person.

"El. I don't know where they took me, but I think I'm in some sort of lab…"

"Show me." She speaks fast and resolute, looking straight into his eyes with her fists clenched. Billy hesitates, not really knowing what to do and what to say. He doesn't know *how* to show her.

"Let me in." El says. "Like you did before. Let me in." he makes a small nod in response while El moves her hand from his shoulder to his. Then, without warning, she closes her eyes and he's struck by an overwhelming sensation, something odd and kind of unpleasant, something that feels almost like an *intrusion*, but a mental one. His last memories flow quickly, like in a speeded-up tape, the fight with Robinson, the cell, his father, the kidnapping, his awakening, the 'conversation' with Brenner…
They part, making a step back, both panting and flushed.

"Jesus… that was intense." Billy comments, rubbing lazily his hair. El looks totally frightened. "Papa… he's alive."

Shit. Yeah, maybe it wasn't the best way to communicate the infamous news to the little girl. After all, that man must be the personification of her traumas.

Billy sighs, suddenly feeling uncomfortable and not knowing exactly what to do with that. It's not that he's famous for his empathy or

delicacy. “Yeah. I’m sorry, kiddo.” He just exhales, out of better things.

“He’s keeping you tied to the bed… he’s been drugging you.” She continues, breath still frantic from her previous effort. Billy gets closer to her, suddenly all serious. “El… this is serious shit. You can’t come here, he knows that you will try to rescue me.” El looks at him with an unreadable expression, but just for a moment. Then, she shakes her head.
“Not possible. We will save you. You’re one of us.”

Billy can’t help it, he scoffs, mean. “Well, you’re rescuing would be kind of useless if you get caught, wouldn’t it?” but El won’t listen to reason about it. She shakes her head again, this time with a little smile on her face. “We will save you. We will have a plan. Man will do a plan.” Billy wants to groan at these words. Why the fuck does she always need to be this fucking cryptic, for god’s sake?! Damn Jedi Master El.

“Who? Which plan?” he asks, annoyed. “We are waiting for the man with the plan. Then, we will save you.” Well, looks like it’s the best possible explanation that he can ask. Maybe he just needs to surrender at that truth.

“Where are you now?” he inquires, after a while. “Steve’s.” the information gives him a small warming into his chest. He can’t avoid smiling.
“Uhm. You’re all having a pajama party at Casa Harrington?” El nods. She’s smiling too, now. “Kind of.” “Is he taking care of you all?” “He told me to wear socks, otherwise I’ll get cold.”

Billy burst into a laugh. That dork. He’s impossible, he can’t help it, he needs to be a fucking babysitter all the time. An adorable, tooth-achingly cute babysitter. Ugh.
Maybe it sounds trivial to talk about those things in that moment of emergency, but it’s actually soothing to Billy’s mental state. So, he goes on.

“Well, tell him to fuck off. You’re old enough to decide if you want to wear socks or not. Take out the rebel in ya, kiddo.” El nods again, this time more vigorously. “Ok, Billy!” she exclaims with a

mechanical voice. Then, her expression shifts a little into something sadder and more serious. “Billy, we will save you. Try not to do anything. Don’t do anything alone.” She declares, and he really wants to believe her. He needs to.

“I know.”
“Steve says: try not to get killed.”
He manages to make a small, bitter laugh. “I’ll try. I promise.”

A small silence follows, and they both know that they have reached the end of their conversation. El is the one who decides to put an end to it.
“Bye, Billy. See you soon.” She smiles, sweet. For a moment, Billy is almost tempted to beg her to stay, to not leave him alone in that bright white room. But he could never do that, and he will never will.

“Bye, kiddo.” He greets her, forcing a sad smile while doing that.

The blackness starts to disappear, replaced by the annoying bright white. He’s in the bed again, but looks like the drug is starting to wane a little, since he can move his head and his fingers again. He can feel the encrusted blood over his upper lip, he licks it, tasting the acre flavor on his dry tongue. Jesus, he really needs to drink like a ton of water. Well, he’s *precious*, isn’t he? They can’t leave him to die of thirst.

They must indulge his requests. Why not try it? Why not test these fuckers?
It’s not like he’s scared. So, he decides to give it a try.

“Ehy! Anybody out there?!” he yells, voice cracked and hoarse. “Ehy! I’m talking to you, Doc! I’m dying of thirst here, let me fucking drink or you’ll find your precious…” his screaming is interrupted by the opening sound of the big armored door. Billy looks at it, quite shocked; he didn’t expect a response so soon, to be honest. The person who enters the room is not Brenner; is not a male either. A woman, equally dressed with an elegant tayer and a pair of low kneels stalks towards him. She has an annoying smirk plastered on her face. Her hair is blonde, cuffed in a ponytail, she wears glasses and dark makeup.

Two military men, dressed all black with balaclavas and machine guns follow her, looking ready to snap when the situation requires it. Well, it's not that Billy is planning to kill anyone. Not yet, anyway.

"Who the fuck are you?" he asks, not hiding his disgust. The woman smirks at him and just stares for an incredibly embarrassing long amount of time, then, she speaks, and her voice is as annoying as her face. "Pleasure to meet you, Billy. I'm Doctor Hillman, but you can call me Brenda, if you like." She adds fakes kindness in her tone that makes her even more hateful. Billy scoffs. "Well, Brenda, I'm *thrilled* to make your acquaintance, now would you be a lamb and fucking untie me? And maybe give me some water, pretty please?"

Brenda, or Doctor Hillman, whatever the fuck, doesn't respond. She continues to scrutinize him whit that impossible smirk. It looks like she's watching a piece of meat, her look is ferine and honestly, Billy could be freak out by it.

"They told me that you have a temper. And also, that you always bark."
"Who the fuck told you that? I don't know anyone here." He spats back, sarcastic. Her eyes are crossed by a glimpse of amusement at those words. "Yeah, they also told me that you're smart. Brilliant. And you're handsome too! Oh my, so many qualities for a single man."

Billy squints at her, visibly perplexed. If Brenner looks like a nutcase, she is beyond reparation. Wat the fuck is wrong with those people?! Considering how motionless and inert he is, he decides to follow another strategy to attack that annoying woman. He must test the waters.

"Oh, wow, thank you Brenda, I'm flattered. Is that your thing? Young boys, tied up to the bed… kinky, I have to say. I like it." he doesn't. He fucking hates it, but she doesn't need to know that. Brenda watches him in silence again for an unbearable number of seconds. Then, she gets closer to him and caresses his cheek, making him flinch in response. Her hand is cold like stone.

"I also know that your problem is that you're incredibly rude, Billy. So, I need to teach you how to be polite. Now… what do you need,

honey? Would you ask it nicely?"
Billy can't help it. He glares daggers at her and decides to dig his own tomb. "Screw you, bitch." He hisses, venomous. Brenda doesn't seem offended or impressed. She continues to have that obnoxious ironic expression on her face, but she eventually makes a step back, stopping to touch him.

"I guess you're not that thirsty, after all." She declares, smug. Then, she twists and starts to walk towards the door, followed by her thugs with weapons. Billy feels panicking, because, to be honest, he's dying of thirst, seriously, literally dying; so he decides to shove aside his pride and beg that crazy bitch.
"Hey! Wait, wait, please!"

She stops and turns her head towards him, a playful smirk on her face. god, Billy wishes he could destroy it, erase that fucking ugly sneer. Instead, he just puts up a puppy look. "I'm sorry. I'm just a little nervous, you know? Since you kidnapped me and so on. Please, could I have a glass of water, ma'am?" well, he's good at acting, everybody knows that.
She crosses her arms, scrutinizing him like she's kind of considering the request.

What a psycho bitch… Billy can't avoid thinking, disgusted. Then, she sighs and shrugs. "Well, that sounds better. Was it difficult, Billy?" he just glares at her, mouth shouted. He can see her walking in another part of the room, then, she's out of his perimeter of sight, so he can only hear her moving something. The two military men have stayed motionless on their spot, like they're checking on him, ready if he decides to do a wrong move.

Maybe he could try to use his power and kill the psycho bitch, but El has said not to do anything and he kind of trusts her, after all. Moreover, the real problem is that he doesn't know where he is or how many men are there in the place, to try to escape by himself without a plan seems only reckless. So, for the moment, he just needs to observe the situation and try to act nice with those freaks.

She appears again in front of him with a glass of water and a crazy grin on her face. Billy gulps. She extends the water towards his chin, but Billy shakes his head vigorously. No fucking way he's going to be

feed like a toddler by that bitch! This is too embarrassing, it's almost worst that time when Steve has put him in the bathtub while he was a restless wrecked being!

Jesus fucking Christ, why does he end up always in those kinds of awkward situations?! That's not fucking fair.
"Come on Billy, open up. Don't be childish." She chants, and jeez, Billy really needs to use all his mental energy to suppress the urge to yell insults at her. He just glares at her with hate and speaks with equal contempt. "Untie me." "I'm afraid that's not possible, honey. So, now, be good, open your mouth and drink the water." This time, her voice comes out less collected than before, like she's starting to lose her patience.

Fuck! Drinking a glass of water has never been so painful in his life. He mentally sighs and surrenders at the idea that he has no choice, and, in the end, he lets the crazy bitch feed him. He gulps the water without stopping to glare at her with scorn while few droplets flow on his chin.

After the glass is empty, Brenda makes a satisfied grin. "That was easy, wasn't it?".

Screw you. Die. Crazy bitch. I'm gonna tear you apart. Kill you slowly and painfully. Billy bites his tongue and puts all his effort into doing a sly smirk. "Peachy." He spats out, in the end.

"Now, have some rest, Billy. Tomorrow will be an important day for you. You need to be in shape." She walks away, probably putting the empty glass somewhere, Billy can't tell, considering how limited his movements are.

She's about to leave the room when he suddenly cries out: "Hey! Wait a minute, what if I need to empty the bladder or something?!" she stops in front of the door and turns to him. "Do you need a hand with that?" she purrs, making Billy blushing like an idiot and suddenly squirming on his spot. "No. Nope I'm ok, actually." Goddamit, that's way too much.

She gives him a last smirk. "…Thought so." Then, she finally fucks off and leaves him alone, not after turning off the light, for his sight's

relief. The two military men follow her like their personal puppies.

His mind feels still dizzy due to the drugs still running into his veins, so, luckily, it's not after much that he falls into a dreamless sleep.

24. Violent dreams

The sound of an approaching vehicle gets Steve out of his bed almost in a jump. For a moment, he believes that evil Russians or evil Americans have arrived for them, so he instinctively reaches the bat under his bed to be ready for a fight; but then he remembers: Nancy and Jonathan. The previous evening they drove to Murray to get him there with them, so they must have spent the night in the man's place.

He sighs, recollecting his breath, and puts down the bat. That night has been far from being resting; he has managed to get a bed or something like that to anyone except Max, who has been forced to get back home, for her discomfort. She has promised them that the day after she would have sneaked out the window to join them, and Steve has told her to make a call if she needs anything.

He goes downstairs hastily, finding his living room full of sleeping people. It's oddly comforting. El and Mike are sleeping on the couch, cuddling in a cute way, while Will, Dustin and Lucas are arranged on the carpet. Steve has lent them three sleeping bags. So, they found themselves all settled in some sort of home-camping. Robin is staying in the guest room and Joyce had gained his parent's one, because, well, she's the only adult one here, theoretically speaking.

He spends just a moment to look at his brats, all peacefully sleeping. Dustin is snoring, figures. Then, he precipitates to the door and opens it, anticipating Nancy in the act of ringing the bell. He finds her vaguely surprised, with her hand raised towards the bell.

"I heard you arrive." Steve vaguely explains, practical. She nods, absently, then, a voice speaks behind her, collecting Steve's attention. "Well, I knew the Harrington family was loaded, but I have to say, I'm quite impressed."

Nancy moves aside, showing the figure of a rough man with a bushy, dark beard.

"…I'm impressed about how stereotyped this place looks." Murray adds then, looking at Steve's house, slightly disgusted. Steve sighs in

annoyance, leaning loosely on the threshold of the door. “Thanks, actually, it’s not mine. It’s my parent’s.” wrong choice of words. Murray squints at him, then, he speaks gesturing towards Steve who is still on the doorjamb. “Only child. Rich parents. Empty home. Let me guess… you got a nurse complex, don’t you, kid? You need to be *loved*, to fulfill the emptiness that the lack of parental figures has given to you.”

Steve gasps like a fish, shocked, then, he gives a quick, wary glare to Nancy and Jonathan, who simply shrug, undisturbed. “You’ll get used of it.” Jonathan drily comments. Murray makes a step ahead and scrutinizes ferine his figure. “Now. Would you let me in this big mansion of yours?” he hisses into Steve’s face. He moves aside, leaving him some space, but he’s still gasping and mumbling, embarrassed.

“I don’t need to be loved to fulfill the lack of my parental figures!” he cries out, high-pitched voice, after a while, when everyone has already entered his home.
Murray ignores him and starts to check at the cabinet near the entrance door.

“What is he doing now?” Steve inquires, clearly perplexed, pointing toward the strange man. “Let him do.” Nancy cut off, observing Murray, vaguely interested. He has now moved to the lampshade, sliding his fingers over the surface, focused.

“You know, Steve. I helped Nancy and Jonathan to figure out their shit when they came to me.” Murray declares, absently, causing an undefined chill into Steve’s spine. He looks at Nancy and Jonathan, who now have put an apologetic look on their faces while they try to divert their gaze from him.

Murray stops and turns to Steve with a sly smirk. “Oh, I’m sorry. Does it sting?” Steve clenches his fists; this man is fucking infuriating. Then, he just lets out a small sigh and tries to collect his thoughts. With all the efforts in the world, he just smiles at the man.

“Oh, not at all. It’s an old story now. Water under the bridge.” he spats, despite not sounding exactly pleased. Murray makes a fake smile too and starts to walk towards the corridor like he owns the

place. What the fuck!

In the kitchen, he starts to inspect the microwave and speaks while intent on doing that. “Yeah, you’re settled now, ain’t you, Stevie? The cool Californian kid with superpowers…” Steve snaps to Nancy and Jonathan who squirm awkwardly. “Steve! We didn’t say anything to him…” she mutters, embarrassed. Murray laughs in response, giving them the sight of his back while he moves on the stove.

“It’s not that difficult to figure out, Nancy.” The bearded man spats, smugly. “Besides, Hargrove is an interesting subject, I’ll give you that. He has quite a history, doesn’t he? …Fucking the punk son of a conservative politician, that was classic! The guy has a magnet for troubles.”

This time, Steve can’t hold back his rage. He snaps towards Murray, finding Jonathan pressing his palms on Steve’s chest in the attempt to keep him back. Steve grits his teeth, red in the face. Damn! That man has arrived from, what, two minutes?! And he has just disseminated chaos and discord like a fucking cyclone! How dare he tells Billy’s secrets at the four winds?! But, moreover, how *the fuck* does he know them?!

Steve is breathing raggedly, eyes wide in anger, while Murray mumbles something and applies some pressure on the lamp on the stove. Then, there is a small ‘crack’, and the coverage of the lamp pops out. Steve’s anger slowly transforms into something else, something akin to curiosity, as he watches the man making sharp gestures while he extracts something from his lamp. It’s a small black microphone that was apparently glued to the surface. Murray twists on his feet, holding the microphone on his fingers, grinning slyly towards Steve.

“What… what the hell…” Steve pushes Jonathan aside and snatches the thing from Murray’s hand, twisting between his fingers in curiosity.

“Spy bugs. Your home is probably full, so, better we get to work on it.” Murray drily explains, putting his hands on his hips and sniffling. Steve’s mind is struck with all his memories of intimate moments or clearly boyfriends’ conversation with Billy, like that time the guy was

sitting on the counter while Steve was trying to 'seduce him with his lasagna'. Jesus… that is way too embarrassing. He instantly goes all red while Murray rolls his eyes in annoyance.

"Relax, Stevie. Secret service isn't interested in the fact that you prefer the wiener over the fanny."

If possible, Steve blushes even harder and gasps like an idiot. Murray is ignoring him and moving towards the living room.
"For your information, I like BOTH." He whines out after way too much time, but the impossible man has already disappeared in the other room.

"Here's the thing. You do as I say, you have a chance to save the kid." Murray solemnly announces, sitting at the head of the table like a proper leader. Steve wrinkles his nose but stays silent. They have spent something like an entire hour searching for spy bugs in his house, finding another one in the living room and a third one in the Beemer. After declaring that the 'perimeter was clear', they have all gathered at the big table of the dining room, finally eating some breakfast while discussing the madman's plan.

"We have Hargrove's location, but that's not enough. We will need to collect all the information we can get about the lab, planimetry, numbers of people in it, surveillance system… anything." Murray pours an embarrassing amount of vodka in his OJ while explaining that, and Steve decides not to comment on it. Murray takes a long, vicious sip under the perplexed gaze of everyone.

"So, we need to go on a spy mission. And when I say *we*-" he points to El, who's munching eggos a few seats away, "…I'm talking about you, kiddo."
El seems undisturbed. She continues to eat without saying a word, waiting for the man to resume the lecture.

"From now on, you'll spy on Brenner. And when I say spy, I say fucking stalk him like a crazy boyfriend. You watch him, always, and collect all the information you can get. I want to know how many times the guy goes to the bathroom in a day. Have I made myself clear?"

It doesn't look like it. El interrupts the chewing and blinks, confused. Joyce decides that is the right thing to intervene in her ever-motherly attitude. "Murray… aren't you too harsh? She's just a child, give her some space…" the man shots her a dirty look. "I'm sorry, Joyce. From what I heard here, we're in a bit of a hurry, aren't we?" Joyce opens the mouth to speak back but ends up hesitating. It's El who breaks the silence. "Spy papa. I get it." She and Murray share a long glance, then, the man resumes the speech.

"They expect us to break in the lab to save the kid. What they don't expect, is the kid to get out on his feet, totally undisturbed, escorted by Brenner himself."

Steve can't help but gasping at these words. "What?! We won't break in, seriously?!" he exclaims, shocked. Murray glares at him. "Are you deaf? Yeah, that's what I've told." "But… but…" "For the first fucking time we have enough time to prepare a decent plan and a power that opens almost infinite possibilities if we know how to use it properly… and no, sorry kiddo, I'm not talking about you." Murray tells the last words to El, who shrugs casually.

"Billy?!" Lucas inquiries, brows furrowed in confusion. Dustin snorts. "I'm sorry to break it to you, Bauman, but Billy… is pretty *shite* in using his powers. Well, except for dogs." Steve sighs and rubs the back of his neck, instinctively. Dustin is right, they can't put their trust in Billy's control of his powers… especially when it goes with humans.
Murray makes an exasperated groan while he reaches a toast in the center of the table. "Well, this time the guy will need to try not to fuck everything up. It's not that he has other choices."

Steve lowers his gaze on his unfinished toast. The idea of letting Billy do all the stuff sounds too risky, they were supposed to rescue him, but looks like Murray's plan is to teach him how to rescue… himself. Sure, it could be less dangerous compared to barge in a place full of armed military men, but still… they're putting all the weight on Billy's shoulders, goddammit. They're leaving him… alone in solving his shit out.

Robin, seated next to him, perceives his distress and moves her hand on his, gently. "Dingus." She calls Steve's attention, who turns his

head slightly to her. “Everything will be ok. You need to trust Bauman’s plan, but most of all, you need to trust Billy. He can do that.”

A heavy silence follows. Steve, after a while, sighs tiredly and makes a small nod. “Yeah, yeah, I know… it’s just… he will be alone in this.” “He won’t.” El intrudes, a few seats away, sounding firm and serious. “I will be with him. All the time.”

They share a long, intense, glance, then, for a while, there’s just the sound of everyone eating up their breakfast. It’s Nancy who breaks the silence, her brows are furrowed in a pensive frown and it looks like she was pondering about something for a while.

“Why… why is Billy so important for them?”

Steve moves his sight on her, interdicted. The question she has made could sound trivial, but, to be honest, she kind of has a point. Billy looks even more important than El, as a human subject, and that’s kind of weird considering how ‘shite’ he is in managing his powers. He’s hardly as powerful and effective as El, he’s more like a loose cannon.

Murray scoffs, apparently visibly amused, his mouth half full of chewed toast. “Really, Nancy? You’re the smart one here.” He spats, impertinent. Nancy doesn’t speak back, clearly caught by surprise by the man’s reproach. Murray swallows his mouthful and points a fork to Joyce, who’s watching him with a confused frown on her face.

“Joyce. What is your catch, Reagan or Mondale?”

The woman gasps in surprise, almost making the content of his full mug falls out from the borders. “What?!” she hisses. Murray sighs and rolls his eyes in response. “Come on, Joyce. It’s that difficult, is it? Reagan. Or. Mondale.” “I don’t… I don’t understand how this concerns the situation here, Murray…” the woman mumbles. At that moment, Nancy snaps on her seat, caught by enlightenment.

“No way…” she whispers, eyes wide in shock. Steve, obviously, is not understanding a thing, feeling dumb while it looks like everyone else has caught some sort of truth. Why is he always slower than his

friends…?

“Seriously?! You think they want to use his powers for the election?! You’re out of your mind, Murray!” Dustin exclaims, slamming his hands on the table, making the dishes clink.
“*Niet*. I’m afraid he won’t be able to help them for the election, since they’re so close… however. The ultimate purpose is the same.” Murray takes off his glasses and starts to clean them with the sleeve of his shirt. Steve decides that it’s the right moment to intervene in the discussion. “Wait, wait, wait a minute!” everybody’s eyes move on him. He runs a hand through his hair, trying to collect his bubbling thoughts.

“You’re telling me that… the secret service, right, wants to use Billy’s power to… maneuver the people’s mind about… politics? That’s… that’s insane! And I’m pretty sure he can’t do something like that.”

Murray sighs again, sounding almost exasperated due to Steve’s apparent stupidity. “It’s not just about politics. It’s not so simple, Steve.” He spats Steve’s name in a petulant voice, making the brunette eyes roll in response. This guy…

“What is the difference between us and the soviets, uh? Democracy. Democracy is a very volatile thing, very difficult to maintain. Peace, order… everything can break easily when you can dissent.” Murray starts a new speech gesticulating dramatically, catching everyone’s attention. “We walk on a thin line, you know. But what if our minds were all connected? What if we could all agree about the same things, happily, and without knowing it? Conflicts, riots, anger, disruption… everything, everything replaced by a good, ignorant bliss.”

Lucas flinches and speaks in a whisper. “This is creeping me out…”

“No more violence. No more pain. At least, well, on the surface, because our mind would be fucking controlled. But that was the first objective of the MKULTRA project. The ability to control minds.” Murray resumes, buttering a toast absentmindedly.

A heavy silence follows. Everyone is spooked and upset, but Murray goes on with the toast like he doesn’t give a flying fuck about it. Will

talks after a while, staring at the surface of the table with big wide eyes. “Maybe… the monsters… the upside-down… maybe it was all a plan to learn their power. How they are connected, how they are controlled by the Mind Flayer…”

Murray nods, chewing soundly. “That is actually my theory, kid.”

“But still, my point is the same-” Dustin intervenes, angrily. “-Billy couldn’t do shite. He can’t control his powers when it comes to humans.” The man shrugs in response. “The kid is just a prototype. They will try to use him and get to know how to exploit his powers. If he won’t be able to be helpful enough, they will eventually kill him and replace him with another one, maybe younger and less dangerous.” “ENOUGH-” Steve jumps on his feet, now visibly angry due to the lack of manners of Murray. Robin grabs his hand, in the vain attempt to be comforting.

“Don’t talk about him like that.” Steve hisses, sounding oddly threatening, considering how collected and soft he usually is. Well, he can’t help it. It’s Billy who they are talking about, not some sort of racing horse which has to be exploited until it’s too tired to run again. Have some fucking humanity, for god’s sake.

Murray grunts in response. “I’m sorry, kid, if I offended you. But this is a war, and I’m just being realistic here. That’s what they’re going to do, keep it or leave it.” he doesn’t sound pissed or annoyed, he sounds just tired. He is right, Steve knows that, and it’s not that he wants to deny the truth about what those men are going to do to Billy.
“…Unless, yeah, unless we save him. Of course.” Murray adds, after a while, and it looks almost like he has said that just to make Steve happy.

“Which we will do!” Dustin instantly exclaims, maybe with too much enthusiasm. Everyone nods and mumbles something at his words, Steve knows that is just a façade, but still, he appreciates the effort of pretended confidence.

He just goes silent, Robin is still holding his hand in a solid grip, when he feels a light touch on his bicep. He turns to the source, finding El smiling at him in her usual oddly ‘safe’ way. She speaks

with a low voice.

“Everything is going to be fine, Steve. We will save him. He’s going to be fine.”

He can’t hold back a little smile in response. Damn, the kid has really the power to warm up hearts or something, now Steve understands how she exorcised Billy just saying a few words and caressing his cheek at the mall.

Maybe it is another of her superpowers.

In the beginning, Billy doesn’t recognize the room. Then, his mind is struck by the stinging memories: the drugs, Brenner, the old, crazy bitch and her damned glass of water…
He wishes it were all a bad dream, a horrible fucking nightmare. That he could just wake up in Steve’s bed again, with the morning sunlight that points to his eyes, a pleasant kind of annoyance… but no. He’s still there, in the bright room. He’s still kidnapped by the evil secret service, he’s still, again, the meat puppet of someone.

He runs his hand into his curls and groans in pain; he notices that he isn’t tied anymore. He scrutinizes his free wrists, twisting his hands, oddly surprised. Someone must have freed him in the night.

He’s hit by a violent blunder when he jumps off the bed, mind dizzy and body quite uncooperative, but then, after few seconds spent gaining back his senses, he clumsily walks to the near toiler and lets out an agonized pee. God, it’s good to be able to move again. He flushes and washes his hands, but there’s no mirror where to reflect. He must surely look like shit. Feels pretty much like it too.

He can finally visualize the room entirely; the furniture is bare, and everything is annoyingly fucking too white. There’s a table in the center, something on it. Billy approaches tentatively, discovering a water bottle and a few protein bars, the kind that you eat to gain energy after you did a workout or something. He stares at the food, uncertain, but his stomach is kinda growling. When was the last time he ate, exactly? Something like 24 hours ago.

There is a static noise and then Billy can hear the sound of the voice of the crazy bitch aka Brenda resonates through the walls of the room.

“Good morning, Billy. Eat your breakfast. You must be in the shape for an important day.”

He groans, annoyed. First of all, it’s very shitty to be observed and controlled by Big Brother in that tiny bare room, second, he’s starving, and he really wants to eat, but the idea of doing what that bitch has just said makes his fingers itch. He doesn’t want to be obedient.

Looks like she has read his mind because the next thing she says is: “You need to eat. Don’t be childish. You’ll faint if you won’t put something solid into your stomach.”
In the end, he surrenders to his basic needs and eats the fucking horrible bars. Once finished, he yells to nothing in particular, knowing that he’s going to be heard. “I’m still hungry. I’m big, ya know? Need to eat a lot to keep the machine working.” Like his previsions, Brenda’s voice speaks back after not much time. “Later, Billy. You could get sick after this morning, so it’s important that you don’t eat too much. It could compromise your performance.”

Billy grimaces. What fucking performance?! What is she talking about?!

He decides to make an attempt and ask, but of course the crazy bitch is not cooperative.

“Everything has its time.” She just says, causing the biggest eye-roll ever in Billy. Crazy cunt. He wishes he could just smash her head onto the wall, paint it red. Yeah, that’s kind of a sweet image to figure out in the mind.

The door opens, not leaving him any further time to fantasizing about Brenda’s spectacular death, and three military men appear, all dressed in black with their faces covered with balaclavas. They’re pointing machine guns at him, and, seriously? That’s kind of too much.

He raises his hands, not concerned at all, while they arrange themselves around him with sharp movements. It's comical how they send the thugs to handle him because they're too scared to do it themselves if he's not under drugs. Always the expendable tokens on the frontline.

"Those men will escort you to another place. Do as they tell you." Brenda's voice instructs from the speakers, in an oddly relaxed tone, and Billy wants to groan back in response because, fuck, like they're not totally pointing fucking guns to his face. It's not that he wants to object on them at that moment.

One soldier rudely handcuffs him, while another one puts a sack on his head, and everything goes black. Billy feels a sudden wave of fear, but he decides to disguise it with irony, because he doesn't want to act like a pussy.

"Handcuffed and blindfolded? You like it that way in these parts." He spats, voice muffled by the fabric on his face. He can feel a man gripping rudely his arm and starting to drag him, while the cold sensation of the metal of the gun meets his back.

"Shut up." Hisses the man next to him, venomous. Billy lets him drag him, walking clumsily and off-balance towards an unknown destination. He wants to try to act normal, but inside his guts, he's starting to freak out. He has no idea of what they are going to do to him, but surely it ain't anything pleasant. There's a part of his brain that wishes just to try to fight them and escape, that part is arguing with the rational, the one that knows El is going to rescue him. She told him not to do anything by himself, to wait and try to collaborate with what they tell him to do. So, he must do it, even if it means to let them drag him with his sight covered and his wrists tied.

They don't walk for much, even if it is felt like an eternity to Billy. They arrive at what is supposed to be the final destination. One of the three frees him and pulls off the sack from his head. Then, a kick in his back makes him crawl to the ground and grits his teeth in pain. When he gains back his mind, the men are already gone, probably terrified by the idea that he could kill them with his power, which is pretty fucking ironic because he is the hurt part in that freaky situation.

Billy gets on his bare feet, he's now in a bigger room that looks like a storage area. The air is damp and putrid, and he can feel the tickling sounds on the droplets falling from the ceiling here and there. The contrast between the clean, white room where they keep him is strong.

He makes a few tentative steps; the room is empty. There are doors, but they are armored and, of course, closed. He doesn't even have to try it, that would be stupid. Or maybe it would be stupid not to try at all?

"Fuck it." he hisses through his teeth while walking with wide strides towards one door. A harsh sound blocks his movement. He twists towards the source, it sounds like an alarm, a red light is flashing intermittently on a big, metal sliding door.

He's frozen in the spot while the door opens slowly whit an ugly creak. Whatever it is, it can't be anything good, for sure. For a moment, there is nothing. Just the darkness in the perimeter of the open door. Billy asks himself if maybe they want him to go there. Maybe it's a mind game or something, he needs to solve a quiz. But, unfortunately, he soon realizes that it's nothing like that.

A loud, metallic screech fills the air, and every hair on Billy's body goes up in a violent goosebump. It's not the first time he hears that horrible call.

A figure appears from the darkness; it's grey, with wrinkled skin and it walks on two feet, looking vaguely humanoid.

Billy makes a few steps back, trembling like a leaf. The creature's face opens in that horrible, flower-like looking mouth, and growls aloud. It does look like a demodog, but it's bigger and even creepier, so it must be a Demogorgon, according to the brat's stories.

So, is that their plan? Billy would laugh if he weren't spooked to death at the moment. They want him to be killed by one of those monsters? Jesus, they put a lot of effort into a so miserable end.

The Demogorgon is walking towards him, never stopping producing its horrible screeches. This time, Billy can't help it, maybe the fear

has made him crazy once for all, or maybe the drugs have kicked his brain irreparably.

He laughs, hysterically, looking at the monster stalking toward his figure.

“Seriously, SERIOUSLY?!” he yells at nothing in particular, sounding totally mad. The Demogorgon ignores him, obviously, and jumps towards him, attempting an attack with his claws. Billy dodges it last minute, then, his body just goes in auto mode and he runs away from that thing.

But where the fuck should he go?! The room is a closed space, even the door where that thing has arrived has closed back. Maybe they really just want to kill him like this, to feed some upside-down creature’s stomach. But what if they want him to fight back? Clearly, he can’t kill that thing with his bare hands, even if he’s good with his fists… no, that’s the thing. They want him to use his powers. This is just a stupid test.

Billy stops running. He presses his back on the wall, painting for the sudden run, and tries to focus. He just needs to follow El’s advice, just breathe, focus and go into the void.
…but his breathing is frantic, his mind is far from being focused, and the fear can’t make him think straight.

The beast has the time to reach him and tries to hit him again, this time it takes him on the arm, throwing him a few meters away on the cold ground.

The pain in his arm stings, Billy lays down, gripping the injured part and crying out between his teeth. The Demogorgon is slowly advancing towards him, grumbling low.
Billy looks at the thing getting nearer and nearer, his eyes full of tears. That’s it. He’s going to die now, die by the claws and jaw of that crazy motherfucker monster from another world.

The realization brings a strange calm to him, like has already decided that his fate is accepted. Time passes slowly. They say you see all your life flows into your brain when you’re about to die. Well, what kind of life he had? Surely a shitty one. He’s fucking cursed, that’s

what he is. Things have never been good to him, and since when he was born, he had been condemned to an existence of pain and anger.

Fuck it. Fuck his mother. Yeah, screw her. Abandoning her only child, leaving him to the same monster that used to beat her? What kind of woman does a thing like that, seriously? Fuck Neil. Obsessed by order, masculinity, authority, when he had made the woman that he claimed to love to run away due to his being a piece of shit.

Fuck Nathan. Useless scum, they were supposed to rule the world. They were supposed to wait for Billy to end the fucking school and then start their journey coast to coast on a van. He believed in that bullshit.

Jesus, he wanted that so bad. He has never traveled in his life, and the idea of tasting freedom… he's young, he's supposed to have fun. What would Steve say if he proposed it to him? Steve doesn't know what to do with his life either, so maybe he would be happy to discover the country with him.

That would be so awesome. He could sell off the Camaro and try to collect some savings, but, after all, they can do it even without having much money. But Steve must have some, doesn't he? Sure they can share everything.

Billy shakes his head, smiling internally. Why the fuck is he having those kinds of idiotic thoughts on the verge to die? Seriously, is he planning his trip with Steve in his mind just when he's about to be devoured by a monster?

Well, maybe he can make it real. He can't let that thing eat him. He has a fucking purpose and so many things to do, to see, to find out. He wants to do it all with Steve, they have just *started*, haven't they? He wants so many more mornings where he wakes next to him, he wants to eat Steve's pancakes, seeing him singing stupidly in the kitchen, he wants… he wants to make love with him again, so many times. He told him he loves him. Twice. And Billy loves him back. Jesus, if he does. He doesn't know if he deserves it, but he can't lose something so good. Not now. Not so early!

With these thoughts, Billy gets on his feet, glaring at the

Demogorgon, resolute. Finally, there is no place for fear and hesitation. Another time, he moves just in automatic. He extends a hand towards the Demogorgon, and in a moment their minds are linked.

The monster stops in his spot, now frozen by an invisible force. Billy grits his teeth. The hand that is pointed to the thing starts to tremble slightly, while droplets of blood fall from his nostril.

The Demogorgon moves his gigantic hands or paws to the borders of his mouth and grips it. Then, it starts to stretch it, until it's open wide in a fountain of blood. The monster's body collides to the ground, now motionless and with its head… flayed.

Billy falls on his knees, painting harshly for the effort. It has been fast but intense. The fear of death that he was feeling is replaced by a new, odd sense of satisfaction; he did it! He fucking killed it by himself! He could be almost exalted if he weren't abducted by the evil secret service.

That has been actually… cool, in the end. For the first time in his life, he could say that he feels pretty proud of his stupid superpower. He could almost, *almost* say that he may be ready to kill another one of those things. Maybe adding more morbid fantasy in the logistic behind it.

He stares at the dead, grey body of the Demogorgon while under that train of thoughts. The sound of one of the armored doors opening collects his attention. Three soldiers, again. Maybe they're the same as before, Billy can't tell, considering how their faces are covered, almost to prove how not human they appear to him.
Billy's kind of excitement is soon replaced by annoyance while they go on with the same procedure: handcuffs, sack on the head, dragging by being gripped by the arms until they're in 'his room' again.

The soldiers leave without saying a thing, slamming the big door behind them. Billy sighs and rubs his eyes with the palms of his hands. He feels tired and sick, as every time he had used his power on monsters or humans. He falls dead weight on the bed, making it creak with the movement. He could use some sleep. It's not that he

has many options in that shithole, anyway. The problem is, his injured arm hurts like fuck. There are three deep cuts on his forearm, and they haven't stopped bleeding yet.

Someone reads his mind, because the door opens, and the figure of Brenner flanked by a nurse appears. He has a creepy icy smile on his face that makes Billy's spine shivers a little. Funny, it looks like he doesn't need to have him under heavy drugs today, maybe he trusts him so much to believe he won't try to kill him, or maybe he's just underestimating him. Or perhaps… Brenner has just a fucking death wish or something.

"Excellent job today, Billy." The man greets, walking elegantly to the side of his bed. Billy makes a casual shrug in response. "Oh yeah? You saw that? I believed I was about to die for a moment, you know." "I'm sorry to hear that. But you work better under pressure, so we needed to create the ideal situation." Brenner briefly explains, leaving space for the nurse who starts to put disinfectant on Billy's forearm. It stings a little, but he doesn't flinch.

"…The ideal situation." Billy repeats, scoffing. "And you're satisfied with the results, aren't you, Doc?"

Brenner's mouth crackle in a smirk. "Oh, I am. But I am sure we will achieve so much more together, Billy." "…Sure."

The nurse starts to stitch his cuts. Billy grits his teeth but tries to look not touched as the best as he can. He can't show weakness in front of Brenner, even if the man has already had him in his worst state.

Brenner just stares at the scene for a while, creepily, because he's a fucking creeper, no doubt on that. Then, after the procedure is finished, he comments, flat tone: "You have a great tolerance of pain, Billy." He wishes he could object that no, it's not that he has tolerance, he's just too much used to feel the pain of every fucking nature.

"You want to test that too, Doc?" Billy inquires, sounding totally casual about it. Brenner scrutinizes him pensively, then, he smiles again in that creepy way. "We don't need to do that. We don't want to cause you any suffering, Billy."

He scoffs at that. *Yeah, like you didn't totally drug me like a fucking elephant, tied me on a bed, forced to be feed by a crazy cunt and then threw me in the lions' den. Fucking psychos…*

"If you collaborate, we can build together, as equal." Brenner goes on, making Billy's sickness raising at these words. Bullshits. Why does this man need to construct all these put-up stories about it? Like being El's 'papa', or trying to be friendly with him, playing the good cop card… it's just very, very fucked up. And Billy is not a fucking idiot as he thinks.
He doesn't say anything back. If Doctor Brenner is as smart as he thinks he is, he can understand by himself that Billy knows it's all horseshit.

First thing he learns, there is a routine there. Just a few days is enough to make him almost used to it. Human nature is strange, after all. It adapts so fast to the new settings, it's just survival. And Billy knows something about survival.

So, he hasn't a watch to prove it, but he is pretty sure that the day starts early. Being exposed to artificial light all day is distressing and confusing, but he needs to trust the hours that they made up to him. In the morning he eats the horrible breakfast, no coffee, no tea, not anything that can alter his concentration. Then, they drag him to the big storage room. They make him fight with those freaky monsters, sometimes is a Demogorgon, sometimes demodogs. They drag him to his room again where he's checked by a doctor or a nurse, sometimes with Brenner or Brenda, but not necessarily. A horrible lunch goes after, as much disgusting as the breakfast. He sleeps after that. Due to the large use of his powers, he's always tired and nauseous, but he has never thrown up after the 'practice sessions', which is kind of good, actually.

Somewhere in the afternoon, they drag him to the pit again. And again, he kills monsters. It goes automatic, it's almost boring; too easy. They gradually raise the difficulty, adding a second Demogorgon, or more demodogs. Billy has to admit; he is pretty shocked in realizing how many fucking monsters they have trapped in that hellish place.

After that, another check-up by the doctors. They register his vital signs, they stitch his cuts, they take his blood. Brenner brings him books, praises him, tells him how honored they are in working with him. As if they were really *working* together, but the man insists on pretending that 'they are equal', 'they are building something together' and bullshits like that.

Billy is just taking some time, following El's directions. He doesn't object to what he's been told, he's an obedient soldier, a perfect rat-lab.

They drag him to a small room with showers before dinner. It's the only room where there is a dirty, cracked mirror. It's pretty shitty, he has just a rough soap to use to clean himself, along with the stuff for shaving. He cleans and shaves under the ever-present annoying presence of at least two military men with machine guns.

After dinner, he reads a little, but he is usually too exhausted to do that much. El visits him only in the evening and updates him about the plan of a man, a friend of them, called Murray. She tries to give all the new details she can remember. Sometimes she talks about Steve, and Billy finds himself asking the most trivial and stupid questions, he doesn't even know why. He asks what Steve is wearing that day, finding himself begging the little girl not to tell him that, or what Steve has made for dinner, just to laugh when he hears some Steve trade-mark dorkiness like 'fine authentic Italian risotto', or stuff like that. It's stupid, he knows it is. But he can't help it, those kinds of stuff make him feel alive, make him remember solidly what's on the outside, waiting for him.

He's always tired and shattered, but at least he has some spare time to think about important things, and he finds himself imagining his future with Steve so often. And it's strange, being hopeful when you're imprisoned, but maybe hopefulness is just an answer to being trapped, after all.

He asks about Max too though, it's not that he never thinks about her, or the others. Looks like his disappearance in Hawking has been somehow covered up. Everyone thinks he's in prison. The police officers of Hawkins know that it's not true, considering the fact that they were stunned when Brenner and his posse had abducted him,

and they have started an investigation about his disappearance, keeping it secretive and out of spotlights.

It's funny, to think that there are policemen who are looking for him when he's actually stuck in that small, tidy white room. El says that one of Robinson's friends is available to testify for him, telling how the guy has literally smashed his head on a roof of a car by himself, which is actually true but also false at the same time. Billy doesn't know exactly how to feel about that, sure better Robinson than him, but still, he can't help the horrible sense of guilt in his guts. Guilt is a very shitty emotion which he fights against continuously.

He's freaked out about the plan, which sounds pretty hardcore and way too demanding. But, at the same time, he's using and improving his powers a lot in those days and he is starting to feel kind of confident about them. Besides, he's relieved by the fact that they don't want to break into the lab, at least he's not putting anyone in danger. If he fails, he fails by himself, and nobody needs to die because of him. That's fair enough.

The promised day arrives after a whole month that is perceived as a year in Billy's brain. They have agreed that it would have been in the evening when their guard is lowered and with the favor of the darkness. There is no space for calculated risks, everything is set in the minimum details by the mind of that man, Murray Bauman. Billy doesn't know him, but he guesses he will have to offer a drink to the guy if everything will be fine.

He'll soon find out.

Notes for the Chapter:

Have a nice, lazy sunday :)

25. Master of puppets

Notes for the Chapter:

This one is huge! Enjoy :)
Warning: violence & gore

He hits when the men are escorting him back to his room after the usual evening shower. Murray has studied the moment when their guard is lowered the most, and after some research, he has decided that one is the best. There are just two men that Billy needs to neutralize and Brenda, watching him in the control room through the cameras she has placed in his room. Just three people to take care of, in total.

When they enter the room, he makes few tentative steps, off-balance. The plan has started; the first thing is to make them believe he needs medical help. Brenda is the nearest, and, moreover, she's the direct superior of those men. They rely on her totally.

He's staggering, giving them the vision of his unstable back, when he talks to the men, voice hoarse and cracked. "Hey, I don't think I feel good right here…"

The two soldiers share something that must be a perplexed glance, but they can't say anything more; he falls on the ground with a loud thump. They precipitate to check on him, confused and alarmed, pointing their guns to his motionless body. Billy is watching them through a thin slot in his look. El's voice resonates into his mind.

You need to put more effort in the acting, Billy.
Well, no fucking shit, kiddo, but I ain't no fucking actor, am I? What the fuck should I do?

The men are scrutinizing him, without knowing what to do. One of them pokes his arm with the tip of his boot, to see if he reacts. He doesn't.
El's voice is audible again.

Convulsions. Do that.

Billy wishes he could groan in annoyance, because, seriously?! But he does what he's been told, and looks like he underestimates his own acting skills, because suddenly the military men look spooked to death.

"He's having a seizure!" one of them exclaims, sounding almost panicked.

Oh yeah, your toy is broking, how about that? Better to do something quickly. he thinks, with an internal smirk, while he continues the play.
It's working. El's voice comments, enthusiast.

"Go call Brenda! NOW!"

Billy hears a man bolting towards the exit, while the other one kneels next to him, mumbling something not audible behind his balaclava, clearly not knowing what to do. Jesus, lucky him that he's just pretending. If he had a real epileptic attack, those two would be absolutely the last ones whom he wanted to be assisted in his life. They're helpless.

It's just him and the other military man, and, well, El's voice in his mind, who is watching everything, ever-present. The man gets closer, wary. Billy can finally drop the act, his hand snaps in a solid grip to the guy's throat, while black veins appear on his neck. The man gasps, shocked and paralyzed, and Billy's pretty sure that behind that balaclava there must be an expression of pure terror.

He has never used his power on human beings since the incident with Robinson, but he has reached the control of five demodogs at one time, so he can't, or he must not, fail.
After the last wheeze, the military man is reduced as a meat puppy, without finding any resistance. Billy can *feel* it, it's actually a clear and net sensation when his mind is linked to someone else's.

They're coming back. Are you ready? El informs him. Billy nods, it's a stupid gesture, considering that he's not with El at the moment, but it comes out instinctive.
He plays dead on the ground while controlling the man next to him.

Brenda precipitates in the room, fuming with anger.
“What the fuck have you done, you incompetent fuckers?!” she yells, almost hysterical, and it’s hilarious, seriously, to hear that crazy cunt, always collected and cool, sounding this outraged. The soldier who escorted her into the room cries out, high-pitched voice: “Nothing! I swear, he just fell out from nowhere! We didn’t do anything, he was fine a minute before!”

Brenda hesitates. Billy can’t see her, his eyes are closed, but her silence doesn’t mean anything good.

She doesn’t believe you. She knows you’re pretending. El states, gravely.
Fuck, fuck, FUCK! No good.
Plan B. Billy announces to her, then, the scene is as quick as a flash of lightning. The man next to him, under his control, shots the other military in the head, making his brain literally flow out from his cranium. Brenda moves her hand to take off her gun too, but Billy’s puppet is quicker and hits her on the head with the gun barrel, making her fall to the ground, senseless.

Well, one dead man and a fainted woman. Worse than their previsions, but it’s just surviving. It’s not that he can stop thinking about it too much.
You have half an hour before someone can discover you. El reminds him, while he hastily starts to undress. *I know, ok?*

He then takes off the military man’s clothes, and never, never in any circumstances he thought that he would have done something like this in that context, or maybe in any kind of context. The clothes are rough and there are seriously too many layers, his hands are trembling while he puts on the thick trousers and the combat boots. The man just doesn’t react, he stays motionless on his spot and lets Billy do everything without any trace of life. When he takes off the man’s balaclava, he finds an empty and creepy look on him that gives him a chill.

He’s doing that. The man is ‘flayed’, as the brats would say. That power is fucking sinister, that’s what it is.

Billy is suddenly hit by a sense of guilt that raises in his guts. To see the blank, emotionless face of the man has given him an uneasiness

that is impossible to ignore.

The fuck should I do with him? I can't kill him, not with his face exposed like that. Billy tells El, kind of franticly. *In your pocket there is a syringe. Stick it into his neck.* she orders, promptly.

Well, that's better than murder someone, after all. Billy does what he's been told and the man precipitates to the ground, stunned in his underwear. A really pathetic sight. But at least he's fucking alive, not like the other one, his colleague, who actually has his grey matter spilled all over the wall. Desperate times desperate measures.

There is no time to lose. Once he's fully dressed, perfectly disguised as one of them, Billy exits the room, for the first time without his head covered with a sack. He has never seen the corridors of that place, but El did. For days, she had just spied Brenner and studied the structure and planimetry of the lab, so he just needs to follow her instructions to go on.
On the left. Walk firm, but not too fast.

He stalks towards the long corridor, gripping his machine gun while his hands are shaking for the agitation and excitement. He crosses his path with a scientist in a lab-coat, but this man just ignores him. He's just another low-rank soldier, isn't he? Just a no one.

Take the second door to the right. Use the code I tell you to open it.

It goes well, and there are no other men in sight. He follows El's instructions for a while, until he reaches a hall, full of people. There are both doctors and army men, all walking around with sharp movements, all sure about their destination and what they're doing. His mouth feels dry. He knows that he has not reasons to be scared at all, they can't possibly know, but still, the idea to be right into the wolf's lair is strong in his head. He really hopes they can't smell fear, because otherwise he would be damned.

Billy, calm down. They can't see you. You're just another soldier between many. El reassures him. He swallows and tries to put up a more collected façade, walking decided towards the waiting figure of Brenner.

As their prevision, the man is waiting for his escort next to the elevator. This is the second part of the plan: El has found out that Brenner lives in the structure, among other scientists. He rarely goes out from the building, but when he does, he does with at least a military man who escorts him.

So; here he is. Waiting for his escort, back pressed to the wall, arm crossed, a scornful expression on his usually icy gaze. He looks different from when he visits Billy's room, bringing him books and chocolates to 'praise' him. As Brenda, before, those people are always acting. It's when you're a nobody like this that you can see their real nature, far from being all falsely polite like they usually act with him. Their precious rat-lab.

He glares at Billy when he arrives.

"You're late." He spats, and even his voice sounds so different from the 'friendly' tone he normally uses to him while he acts like a caring relative. Figures. Those people are so full of shit that it's almost hard to believe.

"Sorry, sir." Billy tries to disguise his voice as best as he can. For a moment, he has the impression that the man has found out who he is because he spends an embarrassing amount of time just in the act of scrutinizing his figure, squinting at him. But then, Brenner presses the button of the elevator and enters in it, without saying anything more, followed by Billy.

The elevator is big and spacious. Billy makes sure to place himself as far as possible from the man.
He's melting on the inside. Again, he finds himself thinking how he hopes they can't smell fear.
They go down for a while in total silence. Billy's knees are trembling, but he must not show it. He stands in something that is supposed to look like a martial pose, but in reality, he's tense, fucking tense, because Brenner looks too smart to fall into their plan. It has been almost too easy, something is off. He can hear his own heartbeat, hammering hard into his chest. It fills the impossible silence of that impossible descent.

Brenner is standing motionless, face blank, staring at the sliding door

of the elevator while it goes down. Unperturbed.
Then, it happens fast. Almost too fast to be realized in Billy's mind.

Brenner moves a hand under his long, black coat, pulls out a pistol and shots Billy's leg, making him crawl to the ground with a yell. It's so sudden and unexpected that leaves Billy breathless and harmless, gripping the injured part in a curled-up position on the floor, crying out his pain.

BILLY, NO!! even El's voice in his head sounds distant and indefinite. It's like his brain is just overwhelmed by the sudden sense of intense pain that makes it impossible to pay attention to anything else. In this state… he will never be able to use his powers. He can't, he just can't focus on anything else than the stinging sensation into his chin.
Brenner slowly walks to him, keeping his gun pointed. He has again his icy trademark smirk plastered on his face. He kneels in front of him and rudely pulls off Billy's balaclava, showing his face deformed in a pained grimace.

"Very well, Billy. That was a good try. Did you think this plan yourself…?" he talks with a mellifluous voice, unperturbed. Billy grunts and tries to say something, but it comes out incomprehensible. Brenner turns his head slightly, putting his hand on his ear in a mockery gesture. "What did you say? I can't hear you." This time, Billy collects all his energy to spits out his anger. He doesn't know if it's useless, or stupid, doesn't care. Maybe he's about to die.

"SCREW YOU!"

Brenner doesn't react to the insult. He doesn't flinch, at all. He just continues to study Billy's whining figure through his vacuum blue eyes.
How the fuck did he find out?! Where did he do wrong?!
Brenner reads his mind and answers the unspoken question.

"You know, my men never speak to me. Even when they need to apologize."

Billy grits his teeth in anger. So, this is where he made a mistake… that fucking 'Sorry, sir', spoken in auto-mode from his mouth. The most two abused words in his life… it's fucking ironic, it's like a big,

freaky joke. He has been discovered due to the old, bad habits.

I didn't notice… El's voice in his mind comes out cracked, like she's about to cry. *I didn't notice… the soldiers never speak to him… it's my fault…* In other circumstances, Billy would tell El that not noticing something like that is perfectly understandable, but he can't now, he's just too involved in the current scene to communicate with his mind.

Brenner moves a hand to Billy's shin, pointing a finger where the bullet has perforated the flesh. The stain of blood is already expanding on the floor. Billy looks at him in pure dread.

"How did you know where to go? You have never seen this place with your eyes, apart for your room and the practice area." He asks, collected and cold as usual. Billy doesn't respond, he hasn't even registered the question, because he's too in pain and scared to understand anything. He feels like his mind is reduced by primordial sensations. It's surviving.

Billy whimpers something not comprehensible, and Brenner sighs, sounding vaguely tired due to his poor collaboration.

The elevator has stopped the descent, but the door remains closed. Billy can't get out, but even if the door was opened, he couldn't move with his leg reduced like that.

"Billy…" Brenner calls his attention, noticing how the boy has started to look around himself, searching for a way out. "…We can do it the easy way or the hard way. It's up to you." He waits for Billy to speak back, but it never happens. So, after a long, theatrical sigh, he presses his index into Billy's wound, making him scream in pure pain.

"Who helped you? Was it my daughter…?" Brenner tries, again, strangely calm compared to Billy's poor mental state. He just yells in pain, unable to perform any articulated spoken word. It hurts like fuck, and his mind is not capable to make him talk like a civilized person. There's only space for pain and anguish, at that moment.

Billy. Billy you need to react. Use your power on him. El suggests, and her voice sounds exactly like she's trying to appear calm and

collected just to soothe him, while internally she's freaking out too.

"Is she in the nearby…?" Brenner insists, sticking his finger even more deeply into Billy's aching flash, making him grunt in response. Finally, he pulls that damn finger out of his wound. The crazy man gives Billy some time to adjust, and for a full minute, there's just the sound of his pained sobs that fulfills the air. Brenner, like the good psycho he is, starts to stroke Billy's hair, hand full of blood, making it plastering on his curls.

"Where is she?" he asks, casually. He doesn't receive any answers, just muffled whimpers. Brenner's expression grows colder, and the caresses he's giving to Billy's hair soon transform into a painful grip. He pulls Billy's hair, making him cry out a high-pitched pathetic sound.

"…Where is my daughter?"
No response. Just low, whispered, wails.
Brenner, with a strong, sharp movement, crashes Billy's skull to the nearby wall. The impact is so strong that, for a moment, everything just goes black with a high, disturbing tinnitus into his brain.

Billy! Billy don't give up! If you faint now, they will bring you back! El yells into his head, but he's tired, so tired. He can't do that; he has overestimated his abilities.
You can! El encourages him, evidently reading his thoughts.

Billy's eyes are closed. He can feel Brenner's painful grip on his hair while the man is asking him again about El, a few inches from his face. But his voice sounds distant, everything sounds distant. There is almost no more pain, replaced by an arriving new darkness. His senses are going away…

Billy. Steve is with me. We're waiting for you! Billy stay awake, don't give up!

Steve.
Fuck, she's right. He can't faint now. He must stay awake; he must reach Steve…
Steve… El starts, then her voice trails off. A sniff. A low sob. Looks like she's crying, now. *Steve is wearing… a blue polo shirt.*

Billy internally blinks in shock into his mind. What the actual fuck? Has El gone crazy now? Why the fuck is she talking about Steve's outfit in a moment like that?!
He has dark jeans. Tight, very tight… white, Nike sneakers. A beige jacket. El continues, and, maybe it's instinctive, but the image of Steve's tight jeans is automatically forming into Billy's mind. It's stupid, isn't it? Why thinking about something so trivial, when a crazy mad scientist is smashing his head to the wall for a second time? Why thinking about Steve's long legs, Steve's smooth skin, Steve's kissable jawline, Steve's perfect hair…

That's just stupid.

Even though… his thoughts feel clearer now. Even the pain is faded. There's a new, strange sense of calm, of tranquility.

Finally, Billy opens his eyes, finding the cold glare of Brenner in front of him. For a moment, the man gasps at the sight of Billy's expression. He has stopped crying, there's a new, growing confidence in his look that has the power to shock Brenner. It feels… empowering.

The man takes a step back, suddenly understanding how the situation is soon going to shift in Billy's favor, but it's too late for him.

Billy extends a hand towards his figures, eyes glassy and black veins throbbing on his neck. The last expression of the conscious self of Brenner is scared knowledge, then, his face becomes a black, empty, emotionless mask.

And he feels. He feels it, loud and clear. Their minds are linked.

You did it! El cheers, happily.
Yeah, kiddo. I was about to pass out, but looks like your description of Steve's preppy outfit has awakened me. Don't fucking ask me why.

Billy has an elbow pointed on the floor. He's laying down on his flank, and now there's a puddle of blood under him. He needs to hurry up, he doesn't know how much time he has got with a bleeding like that going on. Brenner is standing motionless in front of him, like a meat puppet who is ready to be maneuvered.

Billy grimaces in pain when he clumsily reaches a seated position. He puts on the balaclava, fallen on the ground. Then, he talks to the waiting figure of the doctor.
“Now Doc, be a fucking lamb and help me to reach your fancy SUV.”

He gets off the elevator with an arm on the man’s shoulder, limping with difficulty and leaving spots of blood along the way. They walk to the big, underground parking lot, following El’s instruction in Billy’s brain. They cross their path with someone that must be a colleague of Brenner. The man tries to say something to him, evidently shocked by the strange and unusual scene of Brenner arm in arm with a bleeding soldier, but they just ignore him.

After some minutes, they reach Brenner’s car. Billy snatches his keys from the pocket of his trousers and sends him to the passenger side.

You can’t drive in your condition! El objects, outraged. Billy reaches the driver seat with a pained groan. The car smells like scots pine and disinfectant. It’s so clean it’s almost sickening. But still, it is a fucking nice car. Maybe Billy would enjoy driving it, in other circumstances. Perhaps without a leg that hurts like fuck.

Kid, I’m pretty sure I can’t make him drive either. Billy briefly explains, starting the engine of the fancy car. Brenner is sitting next to him, staring ahead of him with vacuum eyes.

Now, there’s the final part of the plan. El has discovered that there are four gates to get out the perimeter of the structure, each one is supervised by a man in a cabin. Obviously, the area around the lab is checked and patrolled for miles, so this is why Murray, Steve, El, Joyce and Robin had to park away from it. Billy must surpass the controls and drive to them, pretending he’s just a soldier escorting Brenner in a night drive. Brenner is the biggest fish there; nobody dares to ask him a thing. So, nobody will question what exactly he is doing.

He starts to drive, leg pounding in pain. He must resist, it’s the last effort. Then, he can eventually faint and sleep for days, possibly in Steve’s bad. He doesn’t give a shit about anything else, everything can be faced later, after a long rest.

The first gate goes ok. The man in charge just opens it without hesitation when he sees Brenner in the passenger seat. Billy internally greets, driving through the gravel in the thick, cold darkness of the night. That place is creepy, it's like they have chosen the most forgotten shithole in the history of the forgotten shitholes. They are in the middle of a big, black pine forest.

The second gate goes well too. Same for the third. Billy gains some confidence, it's almost done, after all. Just another gate, twenty minutes driving, and he's finally free, for real.
The first thing he'll do is hug Steve and smell his hair. He can't help it, it's too good to be real, and, moreover, just the smell of Steve can give him a pleasant sense of security, protection, home. He will sleep after that, but just after that.

They reach the last gate. Billy juxtaposes the car to the cabin with the man in control, who squints at them.

"Doctor Brenner, where are you going at this hour?" he asks, clearly suspicious. Billy breaks into a cold sweat. He makes Brenner turn his head towards the man. He needs to make him talk, to make him act like a normal human being and not like a brainless meat puppet. The soldier in the cabin is waiting for a response, but Brenner just opens his mouth and mumbles something incomprehensible that sounds like a rattle.

Billy bites his lip. Dammit! He can't do it. He's not able to make the man talk, it's a miracle that he has been able to control him at all, after all. The military man gets even warier and talks to Billy in the driver's seat.

"Soldier, take off your balaclava." He orders, now pointing a gun to Billy's face. He clenches the steering wheel.

Plan B. El suggests, and it fucking sucks, because he wishes he didn't have to kill anyone anymore. El reads his thoughts. *I know. I killed people too, it's us or them. You have no choice.*

Billy nods, slightly. He moves his eyes to the man in the cabin, and soon the gun that is pointed at his face becomes pointed to the man's temple. There is a 'click' and a loud bang. Then, the man's blood has

painted the cabin's white walls in a macabre show.

Billy sticks out from the car's window and presses the huge, green button on the screen in the cabin's desk. The big sliding doors of the gate open. He revs the engine and starts to drive, fast, heart hammering madly into his chest.

He did it! He's finally out!

Billy pulls off the balaclava and throws it on the backseats, laughing like a madman for the excitement, despite the still harsh pain he's feeling on his leg and the considerable amount of blood he's losing. Screw it. He did it! He has escaped from his prison, without making the others barge in and risk their lives.

Brenner is still a motionless mannequin next to him. Billy doesn't know what to do with him, but for the moment is better to have him under the control of his powers.
Don't lower your guard. They're coming. El informs him. He nods in response, looking at the distant lights in the rearview mirror. There are cars that are chasing him, and he doesn't know how they already know. Maybe the scientist who has seen him, limping arm to arm with Brenner, or maybe the dead man in the cabin has been discovered this soon, or maybe is Brenda who has woken up and given the alarm; he doesn't know and can't possibly know, but what he does know is that he can't afford to be caught now that he had managed to get outside the big structure of the lab.

Lucky me I'm a reckless driver. Billy comments, ironic, crushing the accelerator and starting to drive at a crazy speed. The road is narrow and empty. The silhouettes of the trees create ugly shapes in the darkness. It's easy to identify where his pursuers are in that dark; and Billy must admit, they're approaching quite fast. How the hell are they that fast?!

He goes on bolting through the narrow street for a while, risking his life every time they come to face a hairpin.

Take the left in the next crossroad. El suggests, after a few minutes. *I can guide you in a shortcurt. But it won't be easy.*
Billy scoffs. *Since when do I like it easy, kiddo?*

“What’s happening?!” Steve asks another time to the seated figure of El. She has her eyes closed and a trickle of blood dripping from her nostril.

They’re in the backseat of Murray’s truck which is parked in a clearing, with the car headlights off in order to avoid getting undesired attention. Murray’s truck is spacious and organized, with a lot of useful tools. They’re far enough from the lab’s territory, but still, better to be cautious. The plan is to wait for Billy, pick him up and drive away from that hellish place. Smooth, clean. No break-ins, no fights, no shootings, no violence. Just Billy using his power to control people and disguise himself as a common soldier.

Of course, in the end, a lot of complications have happened. First of all, Billy has been discovered by the madwoman who’s helping Brenner in his research on Billy’s powers, Doctor Brenda Hillman. Then, he had been discovered by none less than Brenner himself, receiving a bullet in his shin with that.

The most frustrating thing is that Steve knows all of this through El, who is currently communicating with Billy, following him into his mind, even if it sounds batshit crazy but, well, that’s the standard. It is *frustrating* because Steve is literally fuming with anxiety and finds himself asking the little girl what she is seeing every two seconds.

“He’s chased. By military men.” El briefly explains, keeping her eyes shut. Steve sighs dramatically and runs a hand through his hair. “Seriously?! Are they chasing him, like, a car chasing?! Jeez, it sounds like an action movie…” “In other circumstances, Billy might have fun with something like that.” Robin jokes, lightening up the atmosphere. She’s not wrong though, but, unfortunately, in *these* circumstances, Billy is hurt and chased by psychopaths with guns.

Murray is consulting the map, a torch pointed on it and brows furrowed in concentration, under the apprehensive gaze of Joyce. “If that kid brings those men here, I’ll literally kill him myself.” he mumbles, irritated. Even if Steve is annoyed by his manners, he can’t deny that he’s right; it’s not good to bring his chasers directly to them.

“He must lose a tail.” Murrays adds, and it looks like he’s just verbalizing his thoughts. Joyce, next to him, is studying the map too, looking out for the best solution. “El, sweetie!” she calls, after a few seconds spent elaborating the perfect route. El doesn’t open her eyes, but she nods slightly, a sign that she has her attention.

“Tell Billy to take the left in the next crossroad.” Joyce orders, resolute, finding the disapproval glare of her friend. “What?! Are you nuts, Joyce?! Do you know where that route goes? It’s fucking closed! That what it is.” Murray spats, outraged. Joyce doesn’t flinch a little. Steve doesn’t know her that far, but he surely knows that sweet woman has the heart of a lion.

“It’s not far, he can go downhill through the slope and reconnect with the main road.” Joyce explains, resolute. Murray facepalms. “You’re crazy, Joyce, you’re crazy…” Joyce speaks to El, ignoring her friend. “Tell him that it won’t be easy.” She orders, and El nods in response.

Robin holds Steve’s hand, perceiving his anguish.

“It’s almost over, Steve… try to resist for a little longer.” She whispers to him, rubbing her thumb on the back of his hand. Steve swallows. “I know, it’s just… I feel so useless. I haven’t really done anything, you know.” Robin gives him an intense look that makes him shiver. “You know what? Sometimes stopping and elaborating on a clever plan is way better than trying to be a reckless hero. You did the right thing, and the only one useful to save him…”

Steve diverts his gaze and sigh. “I know, I know… I wish I could have done more for him.” Robin smiles, and it’s not her usual, trademark sassy smirk, it’s a smile, pure and heartfelt. “Stop tormenting yourself. You did everything you could, and I’m sure he knows that too.” Steve smiles back, for a moment, they’re just smiling, hand to hand, looking like a couple of lovers. But the tender scene is broken by Murray, who hisses a loud ‘SSSH’ out of nowhere.

“What?!” Steve mutters, interdicted, but the man dismisses him with a wave of his hand. “Listen! It’s coming.” He says, eavesdropping towards the walls of the truck. He’s right, the sound of a raging, reckless driving with loud screeches of tires can be heard.

“They lost him. It’s safe. But we don’t know for how long.” El explains, a little smile on her face. Steve jumps on his spot, hugging Robin in happiness. “I knew he could do it!” he exclaims, not able to keep back the joy. Murray isn’t of the same mind. “Too soon to celebrate. Let’s keep our eyes open.”

“Is Brenner still with him…?” Joyce inquires, pensive. Murray nods. “It’s good. Let him bring papa.” El speaks, and Steve must admit, she can sound creepy when she wants. Clearly, she’s looking for revenge.

Everybody gets off the car, standing in the dark clearing, looking towards the empty street. The noises of Billy’s driving are becoming nearer and nearer.
Steve grabs Robin’s hand, almost clenching it in excitement.

“It’s coming.” El announces, standing behind them, eyes shut. It’s not after much time that a car appears out of nowhere, braking with a loud screech of tires. It’s a big, black SUV, there’s a man with white hair in the passenger seat, and, in the driver… it’s Billy! Steve can recognize him even in the darkness and distance, and his heart bounces into his chest while the time almost freezes at the vision.

Billy opens the door and literally falls out on the wet grass, groaning in pain and exhaustion. Steve doesn’t think about it twice; he runs and kneels in front of him, crawling his kneels on the grass and probably getting his jeans dirty, but who fucking cares, and hugs him. He encircles his arms over Billy’s shoulder and clenches him tight, and it’s so perfect it doesn’t even feel real.

A month. A month has passed since the last time he has seen him, and there hasn’t been a moment where he wasn’t thinking about him. Billy hugs him back, his hands on his back are weak but the grip is solid, and sinks his head into the crook of Steve’s neck.

Steve finds himself out of words. He doesn’t know what to say, even if there’s a storm inside his head. It’s just… everything seems just useless. Hot tears start to fall uncontrollably on his cheeks, he didn’t even realize that he has started to cry.

“…Are you crying, Harrington?” Billy asks, and it should sound venomous, but it doesn’t, his voice is weak and muffled on the fabric

of Steve's jacket. Steve laughs and sobs at the same time and gently starts to stroke Billy's hair. It's plastered with dirt and blood, but it doesn't matter. Nothing else matters, now.

"Are you going to call me pussy for that?" Steve inquires, giggling slightly. Billy finally lifts his head to see him, and Steve can't help but exhale a surprised breath at the sight: Billy's face is covered in encrusted blood, there are dried stains that start from a wound on the front, and droplets from both of his nostrils. But there it is, a stream of tears, too, mixed and disguised with the blood on his cheek. Despite looking a mess, Billy manages to smirk.

"…Maybe."

Steve laughs again and cups the boy's face into his hands, then, he presses a small kiss on his lips. It should be disgusting, and sure it is, considering the amount of blood Billy has on his face, but, again, who fucking cares.

"I love you." Steve whispers to the boy's mouth, gently stroking his cheek with his thumb. Billy nods and twists his head slightly, following Steve's touch, a gesture oddly tender that makes him look like a cuddling cat. Then, he kisses Steve's hand and grabs it.
"…I love you too."

They share just a last, intense, look, then, they remember how it's not over yet.

Brenner has gained back consciousness, and he looks totally shocked and confused. He clearly has no memory about the last minutes of his life, but he's smart enough to understand that he must run away. He tries to open the passenger door, failing. Then, he snaps to the other one, but an invisible force clenches the door shut.

El is standing with her fists clenched in front of the car, looking at Brenner with scorn. The man realizes her presence and gasps in shock.

"Eleven…" he whispers, eyes wide in fear.

Steve grabs Billy by the shoulders and moves him a few meters away,

in order to look at the scene at a safe distance. Joyce, Robin and Murray reach them, keeping themselves behind Billy and Steve, wary and cautious.

There is a moment where El doesn't do anything. She just takes her sweet time glaring at her ex-torturer, enjoying the dreadful expression on his face. Then she talks, flat tone, and her voice doesn't almost sound hers.

"Papa. How does it feel, to be trapped, Papa?" she asks, taking a step ahead towards the car. The man gasps and tries again to open the door, then, he tries to play it cool, gaining back some composure and smiling at El, a cold, detached smile.

"You don't want to do this, Eleven. You're better than me." He declares, sounding certain about it.
Wrong possible choice of words. El grits her teeth and frowns more.

"No. I'm not."

She raises a hand, and, in a moment, the car is suspended in midair. Steve tightens the grips on Billy's shoulders, in a protective instinct, while the boy gasps in shock. "Holy shit…" he mumbles, looking at the scene, incredulous. Yeah, El knows how to be spectacular.

The car is floating in the air, controlled by El's mind. Then, she yells in anger, the fingers of the hand that is stretched towards the car snap closed into a tight fist, while the vehicle collapses on itself, becoming literally a gigantic ball in a loud concert of metallic sounds.

El yells again and literally throws away the car like a cannon, sending it through the forest in distance.

Well, one thing is sure; this time there's no possibility that Brenner is still alive. Billy and Steve are still watching the point where the car has disappeared, blinking dumbly in shock, completely speechless.

It's El who snaps on Billy, who's still kneeled on the grass, and throws her arms on his shoulders in a tight grip. "Billy…" she whispers, on his neck. The boy regains his mind and hugs her back. "Hey, kiddo… it's good to hear your voice for real and not in my mind." He jokes,

drawing circles on her back. They part after a while, then, it's Robin's turn to hug the boy. Steve just watches them aside, a proud smile on his face.

"I was so worried about you, dumbass…" Robin exhales, making Billy laughs in response. "You don't get rid of me that easily, sweetheart…" she laughs, even if she's crying too now. "I told you not to fucking call me that!"

Joyce's hug follows, then, it's Murray's turn to have Billy's attention.

"Billy Hargrove. Heard so much about you. You're quite a troublemaker, ain't you, kid?" Billy makes a face. "I'm on best behavior, sir." Then, he rubs the back of his neck, a strange gesture of discomfort for the character. "…You must be the mind behind all this plan." Murray raises an eyebrow and nods. "I am." "Well… uh, that was… clever. Thank you, sir." It looks like it requires an incredible effort to say those words to Billy, and Steve can't help but laugh a little at the scene, gaining a dirty look from his boyfriend.

Murray puts up a sardonic smile. "Oh wow, the kid thinks my plan was clever. I'm flattered, I can't deny that." he spats, sprouting irony. Steve just shrugs. "Ignore him." he says to Billy. "He is like that all the time."

Billy doesn't respond, he just accepts Steve's poor explanation of Murray's asshole behavior, maybe deciding that he has better things to think of, so he tries to get on his feet, failing. Steve saves him from falling to the ground, gripping his arm and throwing it over his shoulders.

"Easy, tiger… you lost a lot of blood." Steve speaks into Billy's ear, and soon Robin joins him, moving Billy's other arm on her shoulder too.
Billy does an attempt to make a step, but finds himself groaning in pain.

"Jesus… leg hurts like fuck" the boy laments. "How the fuck did you drive to us…?" Robin inquires. Billy does something like a shrug in response. "Adrenaline, I guess…?" "You're the worst, Hargrove." Robin just says, after a while.

They get into the truck, not without a certain amount of difficulty. Murray is wary, he wants to move before the American secret service can find them and make all their efforts to rescue Billy vain.

Once inside, Murray and Joyce are in the driver and passenger seats, while the others are disposed on the ground on the backspace of the truck.
“I did a first aid course a year ago. I think I can stitch your wound.” Robin declares, proud, while removing Billy’s boot. The boy’s head is on Steve’s lap and they’re holding hands. He sighs, tired. “I guess I have to trust you.”

Robin is moving with sharp movements; she pulls up Billy’s trousers until the shin is uncovered. Honestly, it doesn’t look good. The wound is deep, swollen and throbbing, and it’s still bleeding.

Billy covers his eyes with the hand that is not busy being entangled with Steve’s fingers. “How bad it is?” he asks, wary. Robin studies the wound for a while, then, she states: “I don’t think it took the bone, so it’s good.” then, she moves her gaze on El, who has stayed aside, scrutinizing the situation with apprehension. “El, you think you could…?” she can’t even finish the question yet, that El has already made the bullet sprout out from Billy’s shin with a loud ‘pop’.

The boy screams in pain and clenches Steve’s hand. Steve can’t avoid feeling overwhelmed by a sudden sense of discomfort to this, just for an emphatic reflex. He tightens the grip on Billy’s hand and strokes his hair, whispering comforting words into his ear as you would do with a wounded animal.

Billy calms down a little, but he’s still sobbing when he talks to El. “Jesus, kiddo… warn a guy next time.” El has a sympathetic look, even though she doesn’t seem repented by her actions. “It’s better not.” She briefly explains.

Murray, while driving, twists his head a little toward them. “Ah. I got some really strong analgesic if you’re in need.” He announces, making Billy groans in annoyance. “You could have told it before!” he spats between his teeth, venomous. Honestly, he’s got a point. Billy really looks beyond the tolerance of pain and he deserves some peace, after all.

They manage to prepare the syringe. It looks like Robin really knows her stuff, and that's kind of weird, but, after all, what is that Robin doesn't know? She's like a jolly of knowledge.

"You sure you know what you're doing?" Billy inquires, lifting slightly his head from Steve's lap to look at her, his eyes pained and his forehead full of droplets of sweat.
"Relax, big boy… it's intramuscular. I can't miss it." Robin explains, as if that could completely reassure Billy. The boy decides not to talk back, and doesn't react either when the needle meets his skin, clearly used to pain way stronger compared to this.

"You will feel a little bit dizzy." Robin announces, putting in some disinfectant where she had stuck the needle before. Billy makes a face. "The fuck did you give it to me? Did you give me heroin?" she rolls her eyes in response. "I didn't give you *heroin*, Billy!" she speaks in a mockery tone.

Steve resumes the strokes on Billy's hair, looking at the expression on his face gradually shifting from a pained dread to a drowsy confusion. The analgesic has started to kick in, and even the breathing of the boy slows down a little. Robin starts to work on the wound, cleaning it with a huge amount of antiseptic, but Billy doesn't react to it, a sign that he's not able to feel the stinging sensation of the liquid on his leg.

Steve's heart starts to beat a little less fast too; he finally feels like they're now out of danger and he can really afford to breathe again. He gets closer to Billy's ear, never stopping caressing his hair with kindness, and speaks with a low voice. "It's ok now… you can relax. We got you."

Billy is fighting to stay awake; it looks like his eyelids are heavy and keeping his eyes open requires some effort. He's so cute that Steve must fight the urge to kiss every inch of his face, even if he's still covered in blood and dirt and, well, that would be kind of gross.

"Steve…" he speaks, voice dreamy. "…I want to tell you something…" Steve smiles and kisses his temple. "Later, ok? Now get some rest." Billy feebly shakes his head while the grip on Steve's hand loosens a bit. "No, Steve… before I pass out. I was thinking…

you know… in that white shitty room… so' bright… you know…" his words sound messy and spoken with a certain amount of fatigue, like he's drunk or extremely high or something. Steve nods, encouraging him to go on.

"…After… I finish school. School is shit, you know… but… after…" Billy's speech is something akin to a stream of thoughts while he looks like he's speaking into his sleep, but Steve must follow the logic behind it. It does look like something important, after all. Billy sighs and closes his eyes. For a moment, Steve thinks that he's definitely asleep, but then he resumes talking. "I want to take a sabbatical. Mh… travel. I want to travel. See the country." The boy explains hardly, and Steve's grip tightens on the loose cold fingers of his boyfriend.

Billy moves his sleepy eyes on him, his pupils are pointed like a pin due to the drug Robin has just given to him, making his irises look even brighter.
"Would you… would you go with me?" he asks, sheepishly. Steve can't control it; his eyes are again wet with tears.

The idea that Billy has spent time alone in his cell planning about their future makes his heart twitch in something akin to a commotion. And, by the way, Billy's plan sounds good for him. Everything, with the boy, sounds perfect for him, to be honest.

He lets out a low cackle and kisses his lips cautiously, barely touching. "Yes. I would love to." He declares on Billy's mouth. Looks like the boy needs some seconds to realize the response. Steve draws back and looks at the beautiful mess that is Billy's face. This one manages to make a small grin, satisfied. "Yeah, cool." He mutters, and Steve giggles in response, because Billy high and turned into a sweet puppy is something else.

"We could… we could ask Robin… if she wants to…" Billy adds, mumbling, after a while.

"I'm literally right here, dumbass!" Robin exclaims, still working on stitching up Billy's wound under the pensive frown of El. Steve had almost forgotten about her, too focused on his boyfriend's flow of words. Billy manages to lift up a little his chin and a small smile

appears on his mouth. “Oh, hey… the fuck are you doin’… Rob…” at these words, Steve laughs and caresses Billy’s cheek.

“What does it look like? Fixing you up, Hargrove.” Robin spits out, but there’s no real venom in her voice. Just amused irony. Billy makes a face and lays his head again on Steve’s lap. He finally allows himself to close his eyes, and exhales a low “Thanks”, almost imperceptible. Then, he continues to keep his eyes shut, but speaks again with a huge effort.
“Steve… can I sleep now?” he murmurs. Steve sniffles and laughs lightly. It’s so strange, why is Billy asking for his permission for something like that? Maybe it’s just the drugs that are talking. He indulges Billy’s weird state of mind, anyway, deciding to reassure the boy, if it’s his approval that he’s strangely searching for.

“Yeah, of course you can, baby…” he whispers, and he has never called Billy like that in front of other people, but, who cares. He feels too emotionally involved to mind those trivial kinds of stuff. Billy lets out a hum.

“Will you… will you be there? When I…” he doesn’t even need to finish. So, this is why he asked… he’s struggling to stay awake because he’s not sure he will find Steve, once woken up. Damn, he must stop fighting. He needs some rest; he deserves some rest. Fuck, he deserves everything. Fucking everything.

“…I’ll be by your side.” Steve whispers on his lips, and he’s not sure if Billy has heard him or not, but looks like he has stopped making resistance against his own tiredness. He’s sleeping, looking peaceful like an angel.

Robin scoffs at that. “Looks like we got him really high.” Steve laughs, flushing badly, realizing stupidly that everyone’s eyes are pointed at him and Billy. Well, everyone except Murray, who’s still driving, focused on the road. But Joyce is twisted towards them and is wiping a tear, while El is smiling sweetly at him. Uhm. This is kind of embarrassing, but, yeah, never mind.

He speaks to Robin, voice ironic and sour, trying to gain back some coolness. “You don’t say? Usually he’s such a delicate flower.” he jokes, never stopping petting his boyfriend’s hair. His chest feels

lighten up for the first time in more than a month.

Notes for the Chapter:

I hope you like this chapter full of action, we'll get back to some normal fluffy teenage life eventually :)

26. Right here, right now

After a few hours of driving, they manage to get to Steve's place and, honestly, after that hellish night Steve has never been happier to see the gate of Casa Harrington in his life.

Billy has been asleep with his head on his lap for all time long, resting peacefully under Steve's kind caring. Once parked in the lot, Steve isn't really sure about what to do. He doesn't want to wake Billy up since he's sleeping so tight, but he can't leave him in the back of the truck either.

Robin perceives his hesitation and decides to mock him about it. "Are you gonna carry your boyfriend to the house bridal style?" she inquires, jumping off the vehicle and twisting towards him with her hands on her hips. Steve squirms on his spot and mumbles something, feeling the creeping heat on his neck. Then, he decides to ignore his friend and try to wake Billy up in the softest way possible.

It requires some time; everyone has gotten off the truck and is actually looking at them while he shakes slightly Billy's shoulders and murmurs into his ear. After a while, Billy opens his eyes, slowly, focuses on Steve's face and puts up a lazy smile.

"…Hey, gorgeous." He purrs, poking Steve's nose weakly with his index. He… he still looks totally high. Steve clears his voice, embarrassed under the curious gazes that the others are giving to him while waiting. "Billy. Uhm, we are at my place. You should… we should go, uhm, inside my house, ok?" Steve stutters chaotically, while the boy is not stopping to looking at him in that languid, kind of sensual, way, making things absolutely worse.

"Now… we should move, ok?" Steve inquires, tentatively putting up Billy in a seated position. He nods, absently, and mutters something like "anything you want, baby", making Steve even redder, if possible. At least he has spoken with a low voice and maybe the others haven't heard him, but they're putting up quite a show in front of them.

Not without some effort, he manages to move Billy from the truck,

preventing him from stumbling to the ground due to the lack of support that his bad leg is giving him, and the lack of balancing that the drug has induced. Robin helps him carry the boy to the main door, complaining about how heavy he is, receiving an annoyed grunt as a response by the boy in question.

Once inside Steve's house, the crowd of kids is waiting for them feverishly. They almost can't even close the main door that Max literally throws herself to Billy's battered body, hugging him tightly and causing another pained sound from him. However, Billy hugs her back, but just with an arm because he still needs to stay gripped to Steve to have a support to stand. She sobs into the crook of his neck. They stay silent for a few seconds; the only sound is Max's hiccups muffled over the fabric of Billy's military jacket. Then, the girl parts and looks at him from up to bottom.

"You look terrible!" she comments, wiping her tears and sniffling. Billy somehow manages to breathe out a cackle, while Dustin whistles at his figures. "No way! You look badass dressed like that, dude!" he exclaims, pointing at him under the giggles of the rest of the gang. It's strange, Steve would have never thought they could be possibly happy to see him in any circumstances, but now so many things have changed.

They have decided to wait for them at Steve's place, they stayed up until late just for Billy's return. That's kind of cute, how they grew affectionate to Billy, despite the initial problems with him.

"Yeah, well, this is the last time you'll see me with an uniform, that's for sure." Billy jokes, a playful but yet tired smile on his face. Meanwhile, El has run to his boyfriend and had threw her arms on his shoulders.

"What happened?" asks Mike, because, well, clearly not everything has gone according to the plan. El answers for him, pragmatic and cryptic as usual. "Papa got him. I killed Papa." Mike shoots her a worried glance, but the girl just smiles and shrugs as nothing happened at all.

"You're hurt?" Lucas inquires to Billy, looking at his bandaged shin, and it's weird but in a good way, because his brows are furrowed in

concerns. He is, concerned, for Billy. Yeah, things have really changed quite a lot in the past time.

Billy sniffles casually. “It’s nothing. Just a bullet.” “It was, a bullet.” Robin corrects him, intruding herself in the conversation. “I patched you up for good, Hargrove.” Dustin gets excited at this and talks with a high-pitched voice to Billy’s face: “You got a bullet in your leg?! Wow, that’s pretty wild. You can put it on the record of your cool bad guy stuff!” Steve snorts out a laugh. “He got chased by the secret service too while driving, like, action movie type of chasing.” He informs, causing the surprised and interested gasps in the Party.

“Cool! Why weren’t we there?!” Will complains, throwing his arms in the air. “Not gonna happen, young man!” Joyce scowls, her arms crossed and a wrinkle between her furrowed brows. Steve laughs at the scene, still supporting Billy’s tired body to make him stand. “You have to admit that Joyce; it was pretty exciting, after all!” he jokes, making Billy’s eyes roll in response.

“Yeah, we should do it again, why not? Maybe next time you’re the one who gets kidnapped by mad scientists!” Billy spats, causing laughter in the others.

They share other banters and stories in a lighten-up and warm atmosphere, when Steve notices how Billy’s eyes are struggling to stay open and decides to take care of the boy, announcing how he needs some rest. They can all interrogate him the day after. A long sequence of hugs follows, Billy responds to all of them politely, even if is still clear how he doesn’t love physical contact, but it’s also cute how he strives not to show it.

Steve carries Billy to the stairs one step at a time, careful not to push him too much.

“Is it ok? Are you in pain or…?” he asks, panting for the effort. Billy shakes his head. “Nope. Whatever shit Robin gave to me, it’s still kickin’. I’m also kinda still high, I think.” Steve laughs into his boyfriend’s ear. “Must be difficult to disguise it in front of the grown adults and kids.” Billy scoffs. “Not at all, princess. ‘M pretty use to it, ain’t I?” Yeah, of course he is. Billy Hargrove, king of the buzz and boozes. “You’re the worst, Hargrove…”

They arrive at Steve's room, but Billy plants his feet and shakes his head. "Na-ha. I'm covered in blood and dirt; I can't reek your fancy bed like this." Steve makes a small laugh. That's kind of considerate, after all. "Come on, babe… I don't care. I'll change the sheets or burn them eventually. You need some rest." "I insist. I would feel disgusted by myself if I weren't wrecked like that."

Steve takes his sweet time to elaborate a solution, then, he ends up saying it with a small, playful smirk, because, actually, the thought is kind of hilarious even if he doesn't know why, exactly. "You could always… take a bath." He declares, half-serious half-joking. Yeah, Billy in the bathtub has become a recurring thing in his recent life, after all. It was how everything started.

Billy sends him a questioning look, but it seems like he's really considering the idea. He's tired, it's not that he has enough energy left to take a shower, it requires a lot of effort and his leg hurts.

"…That doesn't sound too bad, actually." He exhales tiredly after some seconds spent in reasoning on it. Steve doesn't need any further encouragement; he escorts his boyfriend carefully to his parents' bathroom, keeping him under his arm in order to make him walk properly with his aching leg.

Once inside, Billy manages to let out a whistle of approval. He's kind of right, to be honest. The bathroom is elegant and made with the finest ceramics, and the bathtub is spacious and comfortable too, way different from the one at the Byers' place.

"Jeez, Stevie. Fancy shit you got here." Billy comments, grinning, trudging through the bathtub difficultly. Steve just diverts his gaze and blushes imperceptibly; his family's money is always a matter of embarrassment for him. Besides, he really never uses his parents' bathroom, he doesn't like to scoop his nose into their business. The furniture is a little dusty, in fact.

Billy grips the edge of the tub and struggles to undress, finding almost immediately the help of his boyfriend. Steve starts by taking off his bulletproof vest, followed by the black, snug sweater and the thick trousers. They take a while, but they have all the time in the world right now.

Once Billy is still working on the last clothes he has got on, Steve opens the tap of the tub and checks on the temperature of the water. There's strange domesticity in the scene, Steve preparing up the tub for the tired limb of his boyfriend, it is almost comical, but neither of them wants to comment on it. Maybe they're too tired even for the banters, the teasing, their usual play.

"Careful not to get the bandage wet." Steve recommends while Billy gets in the tub, his movements with a strange shade of clumsiness, considering the character. But, well, he's hurt and probably still kinda high, so… it's perfectly understandable. Billy groans in response, annoyed by Steve's usual excess of worries, and finally lays his tired body in the pleasantly warm water with a loud sigh. He keeps his bandaged leg outside the tub, laying it lazily on the edge of it, safe from the water.

For a while, it's just like that. Steve is seated on the floor, next to him, elbows pointed on his knees, looking nothing in particular, and Billy is in the tub with the water until his chin. They stay in contemplative silence, without moving a muscle. Then, Steve runs a hand in his hair and lets out a small laugh. He can't avoid thinking about the first time he got Billy in the tub in order to prove his lack of possession from the Mind-Flayer. It looks like ages ago, but actually is just a few months. Things have changed radically, as their relationship among the way. Months ago, he could have never, never thought he could have felt something like this for a boy, not talking about Billy Hargrove in particular. He has opened a world for him, a completely undiscovered universe.

It all happened so fast, things have been quick and confused. The deep, strong infatuation he had started to grow for Billy has completely made his mind dazed, stunning his thoughts in a big cloud of oblivion.

Love.

He has loved just another person in his life. Love is an infamous feeling. It doesn't require so much time to grow, but it does require ages for you to get rid of it. It's ironic, isn't it? He has passed much more months in the act of forgetting Nancy than in the process of getting in love with her. It's always like that for who is dumped.

Nasty story. In the end, he had stopped thinking about Nancy once for all just with the introduction of Billy into his life, even if he has never considered him as a rebound guy…

Billy could do the same to him, after all. He could dump him. Get tired, find someone else. And Steve doesn't have a freaky idea of how much time he would need to move on from the boy. It's impossible to quantify… now that he is in the middle of that tornado of feelings.

Billy notices his zoning out and asks him casually what he is thinking of so much.

"It all started like this." Steve declares, pensively, still not looking at Billy, too lost in his thoughts. He can actually *feel* the heavy gaze his boyfriend pointed at him.

"What?" he exhales, casually. Steve laughs again and takes his time to talk. He finally turns his head towards Billy, who's buried under a thick layer of foam.

"You know…" Steve starts, just to trail off in searching for the right words. "Us. I mean… the bathtub. I put you… in the bathtub." His voice becomes more and more uncertain under the pensive frown of Billy, who looks concentrated in the act of deciphering Steve's vague words. Steve finds himself thinking that maybe the boy doesn't recall, so he feels the urge to point out: "You know, that time… at the Byers'." But Billy had already understood that. He looks ahead of him at nothing in particular, and then sighs.

"Yeah. I remember. You were being a total bitch that time." He spats, sounding almost pissed off. Steve laughs at that and can't hold back the urge to push playfully Billy's shoulder. "Fuck you! *You* were acting like a total asshole! I was trying to help, and you were being so difficult, damn…" Billy finally smiles at him. It's a little smile, forced, tired, broken, but at least is sincere.

"Isn't that what I always do? Being difficult?"

Steve leans on the edge of the tub towards his face and presses a chaste peck on his lips. Then, he talks to him a few inches from his mouth, voice soft, almost a whisper.

“I don’t like it easy.” He declares, caressing Billy’s cheek. The boy looks maliciously at him through the thick layer of his lashes, and then he gets all serious all of a sudden. “It won’t be easy at all, with me.” He states, voice wary. Steve is adamant, he presses another kiss to Billy’s lips, never stopping caressing his cheek. “I don’t care. We will figure it out, ok?” his boyfriend nods slightly in response while their fronts collide, and their noses are almost touching.

One month. One infinite month. Having Billy in his arms looks almost like a dream, a bittersweet creation of his mind. Steve needs to remind himself that is real, that is over, that the boy he’s touching exists right here right there, in the stupid fancy bathroom of his parents. *Billy is not in the lab anymore, he is with me, he is safe.* A small part of him can’t surrender to this truth, can’t lower the guard.

They just need time. Time to realize the danger is over. Time to breathe again.

There is a vast future waiting for them. There are so many things they’re planning to do, together. The thought makes Steve’s heart twitch.

“Besides…” Steve resumes, after a while, this time with a playful smirk on his face. “…I bet we will have a lot of fun. You know, traveling through the country, discovering the world together…”

Billy blinks. He opens his mouth to say something and then stops, uncertain. He looks so cute when he is caught off guard like that, he almost looks like another person. His confident and cocky façade lapses. Steve egoistically craves those moments.

“Did… Did I…?” Billy mutters, hesitant, making Steve laughs in delight. Looks like he doesn’t remember about his proposition in the back of the truck, when he was about to pass out. Well, to be honest, Billy looked kinda feverish and delirious.

“You asked me to travel with you when school is over.” Steve briefly explains. Billy nods to himself, pensively. He makes an imperceptible hum, then, he moves his baby blue eyes on Steve. “…And what did you say?” he inquiries. Steve leans forward again to press another kiss to Billy’s temple, carefully, like he’s broken and about to shatter.

“I said yes.” He speaks into the boy’s ear. Billy smirks satisfied and leans his head loosely on the edge of the tub, tilting it back in relax. He exhales a languid breath through his nostrils, eyes half-lidded. Steve is mesmerized just looking at him. One month. One goddamn month. Now Billy looks like a vision.

“…Good to know.” he just says, casually, after a while. So calm, placid and pure. Steve needs to stop staring at him, otherwise, he won’t answer for his own action. He giggles and gets back to his seated position next to the tub, looking ahead of him, with his elbows on his knees.

“I guess we have a lot of things to plan.” He declares, practically. Well, a road trip coast to coast is not something that you can plan in a couple of days, after all. Even if Billy doesn’t look like a person who likes to plan things at all, there is so much to organize. The biggest question is surely how to save enough money to get a damn van and cover some expenses, but he should have some savings from his granny’s hereditary, so… his parents will be furious, knowing that he’s using the money to travel but screw them. It’s not that they have the power to control his life anymore.

Anyway, that is a long train of thoughts, and he can focus on it eventually. Now there is just Billy, Billy safe, next to him.

“I guess so.” Billy just exhales, after a long puff.

Billy is struggling in his sleep.

At first, his muffled moans have awakened Steve, sending him in a state of blunt confusion. Then, he has received a not too pleasant kick in the shin, because the boy is moving in his sleep.

In a month, Steve has been used to have his bed empty, and, even though, it’s not that they had had so many occasions to share it, after all.

When Billy’s whimpered voice gets him out of his sleep, he takes his time to recognizes where he is and who is sleeping next to him. The first reaction is to pure joy in the acknowledgment of the boy’s

presence, but soon the joy is replaced by fear and worry at the sight of his evident nightmare running on.

Steve is laying on his side, chest pressed to the boy's back. He moves his hands on the boy's chest and kisses his neck, starting then to whispers soothing words to his ear. He's used to nightmares and, for what he knows, Billy must have a bunch of issues to dream of after all that happened.

They both have a bunch of issues to deal with, to be honest. But Steve feels like he had made so many progresses and the worst period of his life is finally turning over. What about Billy? The guy has never stopped to face his problems, and he's got many. He has just started to talk about them under Steve's guidance, but it doesn't look like something he has ever done before.

Steve strokes his blonde curls, kissing the boy's jugular softly, until Billy's eyelids flutter lazily.

Billy twists his head slightly towards him, drowsily and half-asleep.

"Steve?" he inquiries, like he's not sure about it, like he's not sure about he's still dreaming or not. Steve kisses his cheek and tightens the grip on his sternum. "Yeah. That's me." "Mh." The boy makes a small hum and closes his eyes again, sighing tiredly. Maybe he's relieved now.

"…I thought I was still in the lab." He briefly explains, even if he doesn't really need to do it because Steve has already figured it out. He just kisses his boyfriend's temple, a soothing gesture that is starting to be automatic with him.

"You want to talk about it?" he asks, voice low, barely audible. Billy doesn't speak back; he just shakes his head in denial. Well, no point in insisting. It's still too early to talk about those things, both in a metaphorical and literal way. Steve doesn't know what time it is but must be sunrise or something, looking at the feeble light that comes out through the curtains; and they had made really late, the night before.

"Try to get some sleep." He says on Billy's neck, leaving a trail of

kisses along the way.

Billy's voice comes out bolder than the expected, totally out of context, considering that he was moaning while having a nightmare just a minute before. "What if I don't want to?"
What? Is he serious now?

Steve can't help but smirk in response while he tightens the grip on his chest instinctively. "Yeah? And what would you want to do instead?" he asks, rhetorically. He has already started to act without command, kissing the boy's neck, moving to his shoulder. Damn. His brain goes auto-mode with this boy. Billy squirms at the treatment and puffs a long, appreciating breath, while Steve is going definitely hard and he probably can feel that; with Steve's cock pressed on his thigh.

Billy grabs Steve's hand and starts to slide it down to his abs, slowly.

"I got a few ideas." He speaks. Now Steve's worry has transformed into absolute arousal, even if in a really short amount of time. For a moment, he asks himself if maybe Billy's not too veiled invitation is just a bad coping mechanism of his recent traumas, if he shouldn't indulge him into that. But… well, fuck it. It has been too long, and he still is a horny teenager who can't think straight when it comes to his boyfriend's demands.

He lazily rubs his boyfriend's cock through the fabric of the sweatpants, finding it pleasantly half-hard. He can't see Billy's face from that position, but he can feel his interested sigh in response.

"There you go." Steve chirps into Billy's ear, continuing the treatment until he gets a full erection under his touch. Billy moves a hand to Steve's hair, gripping it in a clear invitation to going on, and then he starts to buck his hips, timing to Steve's gently caresses… and Jesus, if it isn't the hottest thing. This guy is really Steve's ruin.

"Touch me." Billy breathes out, like Steve isn't actually already doing that. But he's talking about another type of touching… without an annoying fabric between their skin, and Steve can just happily oblige him. He frees Billy's cock and starts to lazily stroke him; he has missed every inch of it.

Billy looks already messed up, because he produces a strangled moan that usually goes out from his mouth after a while they're doing this kind of thing. He's already on edge, Steve can tell. After all, they haven't been together for a month.

"Impatient, aren't we?" he teases in Billy's ear, keeping the treatment whit now steadier, firmer strokes. "Shut up." Billy barks out, moving his hips to time with Steve's hand, filthy and adorably. Steve loves to see him like that, all messed up by his own arousal, a reflex of his usual, way too pride asshole self. Every moan from the boy is a victory for him. And it's so delicious when he just surrenders, when he just gives up pretending that he's in charge in that situation and gives himself up to Steve completely. He trusts him and Steve wants to repay that trust as the best as he can.

"Yeah… that's good, babe." Steve whispers, speeding up the strokes, finding Billy's panting with that. For a moment, it looks like Billy wants to say something back, but his mind is probably too overwhelmed to formulate concrete words. Just nonsense mumblings.

"You're not there anymore. You're with me now, I got you." Steve continues to talk with a low voice into the boy's ear. Unexpectedly, Billy grabs Steve's hand and stops his pace, and for a moment Steve's mind freezes into a panic.

Billy doesn't want it, not anymore. What did he do wrong?! Did he say something that made him upset? It's always like this with Billy, his reactions are unpredictable and impossible to read, it's always a difficult path where you need to avoid making wrong steps.

Luckily, his concerns are wrong. Billy turns to face him, still holding Steve's hand, and now he has a heavy, intense gaze on his face, but he doesn't look distressed at all.
Steve finds himself almost intimidated under that look. He stares back in those blue wells, waiting for the boy to speak.

"I want you to fuck me." Billy states, firm, decisive. Steve can't help but gasping in response, because, well… that wasn't exactly expected and has taken him off guard.
"But… but you're hurt. What about your leg?" Steve weakly protests, finding the immediate eye-roll of his boyfriend in response. "Jeez.

How many times? I'm not made of glass. Besides, it's not that you have to fuck my leg, right, pretty boy?" Maybe he has a point. But Steve is still uncertain, still not sure that one is a good idea.

He wants to do that. Damn, if he wants. But he really doesn't want to hurt Billy in any possible way.

"I…" he starts, then, his voice trails off and a red tint appears on his cheek. He dumbly clears his voice under the scrutinizing gaze of Billy. "…I don't have the lube." He declares, not without a certain amount of difficulty. It's comical how he can get all dirty talker during sex to embarrassed or goofy in that kind of situation.

Billy doesn't flinch. "We can use olive oil." He declares, flat tone. "Olive oil?!" Steve repeats stupidly, high-pitched voice, only to remember that everyone is asleep now and he really needs to be fucking careful. "Olive oil." Billy confirms, now sounding almost pissed off, like he's being patient with a person who is slow on the uptake.

"But… it's in the kitchen. The kids are sleeping in the living room." Steve debates, feeling extremely idiotic. Billy doesn't help with that; he sighs and rolls his eyes theatrically. "Jesus fucking Christ, Harrington! Do you want to fuck me or what?!" Harrington. He's back to be *Harrington* only when Billy is mad or he is teasing him. Steve nods.

"…Then tiptoe to the fucking kitchen and get that goddamn oil. Be silent. Does that sound too difficult to you?" Billy snarls, venomous. Steve's pride is hit at his bad manners, a part of him would like to tell Billy to fuck off and go back to sleep, but the other part is almost even turned on by the boy's arrogance. After all, he will find himself begging and whining in a while, and that's kind of great revenge for Steve.

"Fine! Jesus, the mouth of yours…" he sighs and gets off the bed, muttering something not comprehensible to himself.

"Atta-boy." Billy grins all cocky and, Jesus! Steve doesn't know how to feel about it. In between through punch and kiss the hell out of the guy, maybe.

He tiptoes to the kitchen, finding all the kids sleeping peacefully. Damn… his house has never been this full of people like in recent times. They really need to be careful, the possibility to be heard is… quite high, to be honest. And it's not that he wants to be heard fucking Billy by a gang of pre-teens!

Damn… the only thought is way too embarrassing. Robin, Joyce and Murray have left the night before, so there is only a crew of kids in his home. And they are definitely the last persons who need to witness those kinds of stuff.

He gets the oil and makes the way back using his self-proclaimed 'ninja' sneaky skills. When he enters his room, the vision sends all his blood in his cock and he almost drops the bottle to the ground for it.

Billy is now completely naked, an arm behind his head, eyes half-lidded in pleasure, the other hand lazily rubbing his own cock.

He casually nods to Steve while the boy closes carefully the door behind him.

"About time." He speaks, casually, never stopping stroking his erection. Steve blinks and stares at him, speechless. He's so stupidly motionless, for a few seconds, that Billy stops to touch himself and, on his face, appears something akin to uncertainty. "What?" he asks, furrowing his brows in confusion.

It's just… to see Billy like this, it's just too much. Steve needed some time to readjust his brain. But now he's tuned again. He carefully puts the oil on the bedside table and climbs over Billy, starting to kiss him with a liberating heat.

Billy kisses him back and moves his arms on Steve's abs, gripping the edge of his shirt and taking it off. Steve obliges him, moving his mouth to Billy's neck, starting to kiss and bite it feverishly. He tries not to leave hickeys, but it's not that he has much control of his mental function at the moment.

Billy has moved his hands on Steve's sweatpants. He just goes right to it and undresses him with a sharp gesture, while Steve indulges him in the movements. Billy spits on his hand and happily moves it on

Steve's cock. The spitting thing… well, it should be kind of gross, but it's Billy's style, after all. And it's not that they had never exchanged saliva and sperm on their mouths… so, no need to make a fuss.

To be honest, Steve has thought about another thing that he really wants to try on Billy. It's like, a wicked fantasy on the back of his mind. Maybe it's the right moment to realize it.

They kiss for a while, then, Steve parts and speaks feebly to Billy's face, cupping his cheeks with their front pressed.

"Do you want to move on your belly? I want to try something." Billy's eyes shift in a veiled interest, while Steve feels the need to point out "Only if you can, I mean, if you're hurt or…" "Shut up." Billy interrupts him, and then he does as Steve has told, showing his beautiful muscular back and his perfectly cupped ass.

Steve kisses his neck, moving the blond curls on the way. He loves when the boy is pliant with him, that means he trusts him and he doesn't need explanations. Steve runs his fingers on Billy's back, feeling the smooth and warm skin under his touch, making him tremble almost imperceptibly.

Then, he leaves a trail of kisses along all Billy's spine. He goes down and down, until… Billy squirms and lets out a surprised gasp when Steve's mouth meets his entrance. Steve's hands are on his cheeks, spreading them and revealing the pink hole. He rubs his thumbs on the ring of skin, then, he decides to go for it and starts with a few tentative licks.

Billy almost jumps on his spot and buries his face in the pillow. Steve is studying his reaction to understand what to do, so he goes again, this time with more decisive licks. Billy clenches the sheets and shivers at this, but Steve can't really tell how he is, since he has decided to start hiding. He's too cute when he's embarrassed. So out of character.

And Steve is the only one who can see Billy desperately trying to hide his own arousal when his ass is being eaten. He feels like a king for that. King Steve.

“Good?” Steve inquires, with a smirk, because he’s pretty sure that Billy finds this good. The blonde huffs with his face pressed to the pillow. “Shut up!” he barks, evidently out of smart-ass responses, this morning. He’s losing his touch.

Steve massages the hole with his thumbs again and decides to start acting like a little bit of an asshole. It’s fun. And it’s not that Billy doesn’t do the same when he has the chance.

“You want me to stop?” …even if it’s clear that he doesn’t want it.

“NO-” Billy’s answer comes out too fast and too loud while he lifts his head to look at Steve, his face with an outraged and aroused expression who looks incredibly cute. Billy, realizing he has talked with a too-high voice, brings a hand to his mouth. Fuck. Too cute.

Then, he talks to Steve, this time collecting some seriousness. “Don’t you dare stop, Harrington.” Wo-ho. Looks like he’s Harrington again, now. Steve smirks and gets back to his treatment, lapping sloppily on his boyfriend’s hole and enjoying all the muffled whimpers coming out from him.

With Nancy, he was a very generous boyfriend when it came to… well, eat the pussy. It’s not the same now, evidently, but he has precisely the same attitude.

Billy clenches the sheets and ruts on the mattress, mumbling incomprehensible curses between his teeth. Eventually, Steve gets off and moves to get the oil on the bedside table. Billy looks totally messed up, his hair disheveled and his cheeks with an adorable tint of red. Steve smirks at the sight and kisses his temple. Then, he puts a discrete amount of oil on his fingers and positions himself over Billy’s body. This time he feels confident and bolder, it’s not like the first one, when he needed guidance for everything he was doing.

Besides, the effect that his previous treatment has had on Billy has pumped up his ego.

He finds no resistance with the first finger, so he soon adds another one. It’s almost as Billy’s hole is actually inviting him. Billy grits his teeth and sinks again his head into the pillow, but no, that’s not

good. Steve tuts and talks with a low voice into his ear.

“Don’t hide, love.” He nips Billy’s lobe, playing with the earring. Billy groans in response. “You got cocky, eh, Harrington?” almost to remark the situation, Steve finds Billy’s spot, making him squirms and tremble at the touch. He insists on it, looking at the boy biting his lip in the attempt to keep back his voice, finding it sadistically satisfying to look at.
He adds a third finger. He finds less resistance, compared to the first time they made love. It’s like Billy’s body is getting used to him, it’s giving itself to him.

Billy gets tired soon. “Just go for it.” he orders, sour. Steve lets out a small laugh at that. “Right away.”

When he first enters into Billy’s hole, the heat and the tightness are so overwhelming that Steve needs to bite his tongue not to moan aloud. He has fantasized about it so much but, as usual, the reality is way beyond his fantasy.

“Fuuuck…” he breathes out to Billy’s ear, clenching his bicep and encircling the boy’s chest with the other arm. Billy is breathing raggedly, pinned under his body. Steve waits for him to relax a little. “You ok?” he inquires, then. Billy just nods slightly. They share a clumsy kiss and then Steve knows he can start to move.

The firsts thrusts are excruciatingly slow and tentative. He’s always worried about the idea of being too harsh with Billy, and, in this position, he can’t see his face to decipher what he needs. But, when the boy starts to buck his hips, timing with Steve’s movements, he knows that he can definitely go faster.

He shifts into a steady pace, feeling Billy’s breath fastening and going messy with that. When he rolls his hips and hits that particular spot, Billy lets out a strangled moan that could be very, very dangerous in that kind of situation.

Steve stops and moves his hand from Billy’s bicep to his mouth, careful to leave out the nose to let him breathe properly.

“Sshh, quiet, babe. You don’t want them to hear us, do you?” Steve

whispers sweet and soft into his boyfriend's ear. For a moment, they stay like that, motionless. Then, Steve is about to move his hand away, but Billy follows the movement with his head to keep the hand on his mouth.

Holy shit.

Steve's mind feels literally stunned by this. Billy wants to be silenced by him. Billy actually likes that small gest of submission. Damn… every time Steve starts to think about him as the hottest creature on earth, that he couldn't be hotter than that, there is always something new that can overturn his thoughts. He decides that he needs to express this concept verbally.

"You're so fucking hot, Billy. You amaze me."

The boy just whimpers under his touch, clearly affected by the praise. Well, yeah. He loves to be praised, and Steve knows that.

He resumes the thrusts, going slowly and deep. Soon, the pace speeds up, until the room is just filled by the scent of their sweat and the obscene slapping of skins. "I'm close." Steve murmurs. "Are you too?" Billy can't clearly talk, but he nods under Steve's grip.

"Touch yourself."

For some strange reason, the boy goes on command and moves his hand on his cock, starting to stroke it fast. Steve is chasing his own orgasm, going frantically and needy. It's not that they're paying too much attention about not being heard, anymore.

They come with surprisingly timing. Steve spurts out for what is felt like an eternity, collapsing exhausted on Billy's back. For a while, they just gain back their breath, then, Steve finally moves out from his boyfriend and lays on his back next to him.

"Shit…" he breathes out, finding himself not too eloquent.

Billy twists on his flank, and his face is simply beyond. He looks ragged, cheeks red, mouth parted and eyes wide. What a sight.

Steve lets out a small laugh and kisses his chin. "That was amazing."

He speaks softly on Billy's lips. The boy collects some composure and nods. "Yeah, that was… yeah." He mutters, clumsily, and it's so strange to see him like that, without his usual thick layers of cockiness, of confidence, just taken off guard. He's adorable.

Steve giggles. "Guess we were a little noisy in the end, though. I really hope we didn't wake up the kids." At these words, Billy sends a perplexed look and blinks absently. Then, he lays his head back on the pillow with a loud groan.

"Jeez, Stevie. Just the fact that you've been hosting a gang of brats into your place is creepy enough."

Steve makes a face. "Listen, man, they helped get your ass out of that freaky lab. They're good kids." Then, after a dramatic pause, he adds: "They're my kids." Billy sends him a snarky look, clearly about to say something spicy. "They're my kids." He mocks Steve back, making him blush stupidly at that. Then, he pokes Steve's chest with two fingers, grinning wolfishly.

"Look at you, momma Steve. I guess I really kept up my record of being a mother-fucker."

Steve snorts and pushes him. "You're so full of shit, Hargrove!" Billy has the response ready for that, he talks grimacing and wrinkling his nose. "Actually, I'm pretty sure I'm full of your spunk, Harrington. I can feel it dripping all over my thighs."

Steve becomes the same color as a tomato and decides to divert the topic of the conversation, fumbling for his pajama through the sheet.

"Let's get some breakfast, ok?" he stupidly asks, out of nowhere. Billy has nothing to object on it.

"Sounds like a good plan."

Billy is sitting at the dining table, eating tasty bacon and eggs, surrounded by the brats. It's kind of surreal, that's what it is. But he has already agreed to join all the kind of stuff with those kids. He has been trained by a 13-years-old girl, forced to control a dog with his

mind under their incessant hollering, he has been hunting monsters with them, he has even spent an afternoon playing lame videogames at the arcade with them.

So, a breakfast altogether is just another thing to put in the way too long list of things Billy Hargrove has done with the nerds. But it's not that they are *friends*, not at all.
They haven't been stopping interrogating him, obviously all excited just early in the morning. He was way too exhausted the night before to answer whatever questions, so, now he has no excuses.

"So, the doctor, she's like, Brenner's assistant?" Dustin inquires, pensive, rubbing his chin with furrowed brows. Billy shrugs in response. "I guess so. She was kinda creepy, like, sexy creepy." "Ew!" Max pokes at his arm, making a disgusted face. Billy just raises his brows, a look that seems to tell 'What?!', and continues to eat undisturbed.

"And she's still alive…" Will speaks, thoughtfully. Billy nods. "Yep. She is." The month in the lab is still a fresh wound in his mind, he has been freed like, the night before, after all. And that woman, that woman actually scares the hell out of him. He doesn't even know why he didn't kill her, she sure deserved it.

Thing is, they could be back for him. They could chase him, and he goddamn knows well that. He's just avoiding the thought, while he can. Relax a little. Breathe a little.
Steve perceives his distress immediately, of course. He shoots him an inquiring glare and then talks aloud to the kids. "Let him eat in peace, you brats! Leave the guy some space." The kids all roll their eyes in unison to that.

"Were you always this protective with my sister too, Steve? Or is it just a guy's thing?" Mike spats, bitchy as usual, for Billy's opinion. Steve gasps a little at that, clearly taken by surprise, but then, he manages to counterattack, talking with a smirk, faking to be undisturbed by Mike's nosy question. "Yes, I was, Mike, thanks for caring."

Billy instantly shoots him a dirty glare, while Max lets out an amused whistle. "Oh-oh. You're getting him jealous, Stevie." Billy moves his

look on his stepsister at that. “Shut up, shitbird.” He snarls, poisonous. She seems totally unaffected.

“Don’t worry. I think you’re prettier than her.” She pats Billy’s shoulder, just adding fuel to the fire. Steve clenches his hair, already exasperated.

“Guys, we’re so not having this conversation, right now!” he barks, causing the giggles of the crowd of nerds. Figures.

Billy chews his eggs with a new spark of anger caused just by the mention of Nancy. Before everyone can add another thing, the bell rings and Steve rushes towards it, almost running.

Billy points his fork on Mike, who’s smirking all nasty like usual. “You-” he spats, eyes on him in his best intimidating glare. “You’re an insolent little piece of shit, you that,
Wheeler?” Mike throws his arms in the air in a mocking gesture. “Woah, scary. Try another one, dude.”

Jesus Christ! The kid is seriously on the edge. Lucky he is one of Steve’s puppies because, hell, he seriously needs a punch in the face. Just for, well, educational reasons.

They can’t go on because there are new people who are introduced to the scene. Two police officers, to be precise and, well, looks like that morning can’t stop adding strangeness to Billy. He freezes, caught off guard, and blinks stupidly at them, while everyone gets silent at their intromission. The policemen look equally shocked at his sight, like he’s some sort of apparition or something. They just stay still in front of the table, staring dumbfounded at the scene ahead of them, gasping like idiots.

“Fuck me…” one of them sighs, a guy with glasses and thick curly hair. He pats his partner’s shoulder while pointing a finger towards the still seated figure of Billy. “Are you seeing what I’m seeing, Calvin?” he inquires. His colleague, a tall, black man, nods with his brows furrowed. “Yep. It’s definitely the Hargrove kid there.” They talk to themselves like they’re commenting on a movie, like Billy is not actually in front of them. He recollects some composure and sighs, dropping the fork over the plate with an annoyed gesture.

“Good morning, officers. What can I do for you?” he tries to keep his voice sort of polite, but he’s not sure he succeeds in that. It’s not that he is the biggest fan of the police, and it’s not that he has a minimum trace of willingness to talk with fucking cops at eight in the morning of a sunny Sunday. He darts his eyes towards Steve, who’s standing behind the men awkwardly, leaning on the threshold. He looks kind of nervous, nipping his nails while watching at the scene all wary.

Maybe they’re going to arrest him again. Last time, before he has been abducted, he was in a cell, after all. There’s still Robinson’s situation that needs to be solved. Billy tries to act cool, but internally he’s starting to melt. He feels like he has had a small parenthesis of wellness in the shitty mess that his life is. It’s almost cruel.

Max, without saying anything, gets on her feet and plants herself in front of Billy, protective. He sends her a confused glare. What the hell is she doing? She’s just a kid. But, even though, he can’t avoid feeling strangely warmed up by her protectiveness… it’s cute.

“Over my dead body you will arrest him!” she announces, crossing her tiny arms on her chest, trying to look bigger and scarier. Soon, El supports her, placing herself next to her. Billy blinks in shock at that. Two little girls trying to protect him from the cops? Way too weird.

But what is even weirder is to have the entire crowd of brats (even Wheeler!), facing the officers with a firm expression, creating a human barrier over Billy, who is still seated on his spot, speechless.

The policeman with glasses throws his arm in the air in a gesture of surrender. “Wait, wait, wait a minute, you all! We ain’t here to arrest anybody.” “Yeah. We received a call. Someone told us that Billy Hargrove is safe and sound at the Harrington’s place and that we can stop looking for him in the woods.” The colored man explains, practical.
So. Someone called. Who the fuck is it? But, most of all, were the police searching for him… in the woods? That’s fucking stupid, isn’t it?

“So, now.” the man resumes, officer Powell, if Billy recalls correctly from his last unpleasant visit to the police station. “Billy, would you mind telling us what happened?”

Billy hesitates. He still has the array of children busy in protecting him, and that's kind of exaggerated and even maybe a little stupid. He gets on his feet in order to see the officers, since he has a human barrier blocking his sight.

"What about Robinson's fact?" he inquires, severe.

Officer Callahan, the glassed man, actually scoffs. Like it's something amusing. "Robinson? He doesn't want to press charge anymore. We collected enough evidence to prove that the kid hurt himself." "Yeah." Powell sniffles and brings his hands on his hips. "He has spent two weeks in a psych ward for self-harming, and now I guess he's having some goddamn therapy or something. Anyway, it's not your concern now."

He doesn't want to press charge anymore. Billy can't hold back a wave of relief. He almost wants to laugh in joy. He runs his hands to his hair, exhaling a long, liberating breath. Max grabs his bicep and smiles sweetly at him. "It's great. Isn't it?" she chirps. Billy, out of smart things to say, just nods and smiles dumbly at his stepsister.

One problem… one fucking problem above a big list, is solved. He moves his gaze on Steve, who is smiling at him, still leaning on the threshold. Billy can't tell, it's hard to explain, but sometimes looks like a single glance is sufficient to communicate a thousand things, between them.

"So, you were talking about where you have been for a month." Powell resumes, and, for a moment, Billy has forgotten about the cops, focused on Steve's pretty face as he was. He awkwardly clears his voice.

He says the first made-up idiotic story he gets. He uses the same that has been used with the kid Byers.

"Lost in the woods."

It's clear how he's not even putting some effort into making it believable, but it's not that the policemen need to believe him. They just need to leave him alone, period.
Callahan tsks him, while Powell looks more inclined to keep up the

serious façade. “Son… our district has been attacked. Me, my men, we all woken up facing the floor with darts on our necks. Don’t expect me to believe that bullshit; someone kidnapped you.” He then points to Will, who’s still standing with his fists clenched in front of Billy, with a rare expression of determination on his face. “…Maybe the same who took you too, Byers. I don’t know. What I know, as an officer, is that the kids ain’t safe in this town anymore. And I couldn’t sleep the night if I wouldn’t even try to protect them, that’s my job.”

Billy scoffs at that. “Protect us?! You got me arrested for no fucking reason, officer.” He spats, venomous. Well, technically it’s not true, it was his fault for Robinson’s beating, but he doesn’t need to know that. He walks past through the kids, to face the men better, challenging them with a firm look.

“I know.” Powell sighs, looking vaguely defeated. “And you have no idea how I feel guilty about it. We failed. What can I say? We’re human, kid.”

Billy gasps after the heavy statement, feeling his anger evaporating away. He hasn’t got the time to keep feeling angry. It’s getting more and more tiring.

“Your father.” Callahan starts, rubbing the back of his neck, a little awkwardly. “We tried to contact him. He said that he didn’t care if you had been kidnapped. That probably you ran to California to…” he clears his voice, a slight red tint on his face. “…*Whoring* around.”

Billy scoffs, undisturbed to have been just called ‘whore’ in front of everybody. “Figures.” He spats, moving his hand on his hips. “He doesn’t give a shit about me. Probably he was relieved to have me out of his feet.”

This statement makes the officers uncomfortable, it’s clear. They squirm on their spots, not sure what to say, uneasy. Billy hates their sympathetic gazes. He sighs, suddenly feeling way too tired of this shit.

“Listen, you want to help me, right?” he asks, finding the affirmative nods in the men. “So just… drop it. Close the case. Say that I got lost in the woods, I don’t know, I don’t care… just silence it, once for all.

And we can forget about this unpleasant situation and get back to our lame lives."

The officers mumble something and take their time to think about it. Billy knows that he's asking a favor of biblical proportions, but what are they gonna do? Investigate about it? Play the detective of that shithole town? Find the governate conspiracy behind it?

After a while, Callahan sighs. "Hop would have known what to do." He declares, gravely and defeated, but it actually sounds like a win for Billy.

Billy and Max must accept the lift from the cops, in the end. It's always better than coming home with Steve and put him at the risk to have a psycho father against him, after all.
Billy doesn't know how to feel. It's like he's drained from his emotions. He doesn't feel scared, not anymore. Too much shit happened in the last month and now the prospect of an angry Neil doesn't look that frightening anymore. Besides… last time they argued, when he was kept in that cell at the police station, Neil has shown weakness, hesitation. For the first time in Billy's life, his dad had seemed actually… defeated.

He doesn't know if he's going to make him pay for that, but he's not intimidated by it either.

Max, seated next to him in the backseats, holds his hand, with a concerned expression on her face. Billy looks absently at their fingers entangled together, then; he shifts his gaze on her. He manages to make something akin to a smile.

"Don't sweat it, shitbird. 'S gonna be alright."

Max smiles back, even if her brows are furrowed in an apprehensive look. She has become so protective toward him… he should be the one who protects her. He's the big brother, after all.

Brother and sister…

It's strange how you can fix the shattered pieces of a bond that

seemed destroyed. Billy had hated Max since the first time they had seen each other. But then, they have become kind of friendly. There had been a period when they were almost accomplices. She had even met Nathan, the guy has soon started to try to brainwash her, as every person who has the fortune or misfortune to orbit into his gravity. He had taught her how to skate. Tsk. Figures.

Then, something broke, and it looked irreparable.

An interdimensional monster was needed to help them recreate their relationship.

They arrive at their shitty hole in Cherry Road. They walk toward the entrance door escorted by the officers, Billy supported by crutches that Steve has given to him ("from the time I got my ankle broken"). It looks kinda like the path to the gallows. Whatever. Whatever will happen, Billy is ready.

Powell rings the bell, and it's not after much that the door opens, showing the dark figure of Neil looking dumbfounded at the unexpected quartet on the threshold. He gasps in surprise, his blue eyes darting from the injured leg of his son to the frowned face of Max to the police officers. Before he can tell anything, Powell speaks first. "Good morning, sir. I believe we have found your son, Billy Hargrove."

Billy doesn't flinch. He stares right into his father's eyes, challenging him. Inflexible. The whole scene looks too stupid.

After what seems an eternity, Neil mutters straight to Billy, clearly still under shock.

"The hell have you been…?" the question comes out as an incredulous whisper, sounding so out of character. Billy doesn't answer. Just stares back, motionless.

The tension and the awkwardness are vivid in the officers. Callahan rubs the back of his neck and clears his voice. "The Robinson kid is not a problem anymore. He won't press charge, and we had enough evidence that state that Billy didn't touch him. So, uhm, the legal troubles of your son are over…"

It looks like Neil isn't paying too much attention to the policeman's words. He keeps scrutinizing Billy, expression unreadable. Soon Susan joins him on the doorjamb, sighing in surprise at the sight of them.

"Morning, madame." Powell briefly greets her.

"Billy… you're hurt! What happened? Where were you?!" Susan looks worried and apprehensive, and that's kind of odd. It's not that she ever gave a shit about him since he has become his stepson. It's not that she has ever tried to stop Neil from beating the shit out of him, but she's a victim of him too, so, Billy doesn't blame her.

There are very few people who have the balls to confront his father. For whatever strange reason, Billy has this new sense of confidence to think of himself as one of them, now.
He's not the scared, trembling kid anymore. He doesn't feel like a victim. Doesn't want to.

Neil finally pays attention to the cops and talks with a stern tone. "Good job, officers. From now on, I can take care of it." the men squirm on their spot, uneasy. They exchange suspicious glances, and Billy can't help but rolls his eyes at that awkward reaction.

"It's ok, officers. I can deal with that." he informs them, and it's actually pretty idiotic how he needs to *reassure* those incompetent dorks to get rid of them.

"Billy, if you need anything…" Callahan starts, then, his voice trails off, uncertain. Billy dismisses him with a wave of his hand, leaving a crutch leaning alongside his flank. "Yeah, yeah. Consider it done."

They finally leave, not after some last shared glances with Neil, who greets them politely but with a cold voice, sharp as ice.

When they enter the home, it looks almost foreign to Billy. More than a month has passed, where he has just moved into another prison. Max is standing next to him and doesn't look inclined to leave, like she's his mini bodyguard or something. Susan looks all wary like a jittery bird, as usual.

Neil decides to spend another abundant amount of time just staring at his son from up to the bottom. Yeah, Billy knows; he has got different clothes, again. At least, this time they're from the boy who is fucking for real, not as the last one. Ironic.

"Where have you been?" Neil spats. It doesn't even sound like a question, more like a statement. Billy half-shrug. "Lost in the woods."

"Does it matter?" he adds, then, with a new sparkle of cockiness he didn't even know he had with his old-man. Neil scoffs. "I'm your father. What do you think?" Billy makes a sad, tired cackle. "Right, you're my father."

A heavy silence follows. Max and Susan are watching the scene cautiously. Neil never beats him in front of them. If he wants to do one of his 'lessons' about what good behavior is, he's going to do it in Billy's room. For now, it doesn't seem like it, even if is atypical. Maybe he's moved by the fact that Billy isn't even able to walk by himself, but pity would be a foreign concept on him.

Neil is looking at him with an intense gaze, fists and jaw clenched. The waiting is becoming unnerving.

Billy opens his mouth to speak, because, seriously, get a fucking move already, but Neil intercepts him first. "What are you going to do now?"

He can't avoid blinking dumbly at this way too unexpected question. It's simple, very basic, but also too fucking relevant. Billy knows that Neil's 'now' is not as in *right now*, he's not an idiot. But still, why is he asking him about his future projects? When did he ever do that?

"I'm going to graduate." Billy announces, in a flat voice. Well, he hopes he could do that even if he had lost an entire month of school. "…Then I'm going to get away from your feet forever." He ends, with the same lack of emotion. It really sounds like the craziest conversation he had ever had in his life.

Neil takes his sweet time to respond. What comes out of his mouth is something almost paranormal.

"…You're leaving."

Three words with the heaviness of a boulder. There is a tacit 'Like her' in Neil's statement.

Billy nods and stays silent. He feels like he doesn't need to give any explanation to him. He doesn't deserve it. After an eternity, Neil takes a step back and runs a hand all over his face. Suddenly, he looks ten years older.

Billy was expecting him to burst into anger, he wasn't expecting this. He doesn't know how to deal with this, he has never, never seen his father so broken. He looks almost on the verge to cry, but Billy knows he could never do something like that. He will be damned before he could reach that bottom.

It doesn't look like he has something else to say, and doesn't look like he would be able to do it too. Billy has the feeling that probably his father's voice would come out cracked, would sound like someone else's.

So, he just goes to his room, without saying anything, without asking permission. He doesn't need to. No more.

His body feels drained and heavy, detached from reality. He just needs some rest. It has been an intense morning. Then, he would call Robin to ask about school and start to work on it, getting his mind involved and busy with practical things so he will not implode due to his own thoughts.

Maybe he will call Steve in the evening to know how he's doing. Screw if Neil gets curious about who the fuck he decides to call, he just has to start his father's shit again and Billy isn't sure how he will respond.

He has nothing to lose. Neil wants to kick him out of his house? Then fucking do it.

Billy has reached a level where he really can't give a shit about it anymore. It's some sort of creative desperation that opens a lot of new possibilities.

In the past, he could have only relied on Neil. But now it’s different, now he has people who really care about him, who can help him in the moment of need. He’s not under the thumb anymore, and Neil has understood it. And Neil fears it.

It’s good to be back.

Notes for the Chapter:

2 more and that's it :)

27. You only live once

Billy has never desired to not have attention on him more in his life. Yeah, exactly. Quite unusual, isn't it?

He's walking through the corridor, supported by the crutches, flanked by Robin, who's summarizing the rumors that are actually running on his persona at the moment, while everybody's eyes are pointed at him, people whispering and hissing stuff at his sight.

"Some people say that you have been in jail due to Robinson's accident. I think that's the most common one." She explains, gesturing excitedly like she's telling the plot of a good movie. "Some are saying that you have been to the hospital. Some are even saying that you got HIV. This is a consequence of, uhm, the other rumor. The one about you…" "…Being a queer?" Billy finishes for her, raising an eyebrow. She nods. "Yeah, that one. Most of all, I think they're scared shitless of you, now."

Billy scoffs, mean. It's not something new, isn't it? Back in Cali he had the fame of resident nutcase and psycho in school, after all. It's quite common that people fear him, and he makes sure to give people plenty of reasons to do it.

"…Good to know. Like I give a shit." he comments, flat voice.

They have arrived at Billy's locker. He clumsily fumbles into his bag to reach the books, and soon Robin assists him, without being asked. Truth is, Billy would have never done that. But he's appreciative of it, even if he's allergic to saying things like 'thank you'.

"What are you going to tell the principal?" she inquires, and it looks like she's trying to hold back her preoccupation, acting nonchalantly. Billy closes the locker with a loud bang. "Guess I'll improvise. I was thinking, dunno, maybe I could benefit a bit of that freaky power that monster gave to me." Billy says that casually, but Robin's reaction is something akin to indignation.

She gasps, looking strangely stupid like that, considering her usual smartass façade.

“Hargrove… that’s not…” Billy squints at her. “…Not fair? Not ethical?” he tries in a mocking tone, founding her silent approval. “Screw it. I’ve hated this goddamn power since I got it, but now it is starting to get interesting. I must admit, those psychos at the lab taught me good about how to use it.” still, she’s not convinced.

They lay on the lockers, watching at the people roaming around.

“It could be dangerous.” Robin reminds him, shoulder to shoulder to him and with her sight pointed to nothing in particular. Billy shrugs. “Naah. I think I get it, now. Look.”
He focuses on a nameless boy walking in front of them, and, in an instant, their minds are linked. The boy freezes on his spot, then, he takes a few steps towards him. Robin is staring at the scene with her mouth parted and her eyes widened. Billy grabs his bag, stretches his arm toward the boy and just drops the bag to the ground, making all the contents crawling on the floor.

The guy kneels and starts to pick up the things, collecting them carefully in the bag. Then, he lifts and extends it on Billy, face blank and emotionless.

“Too kind.” Billy chirps, getting back the bag under the scrutinizing gaze of his friend. The boy takes a few steps back into the crowd, then, Billy ‘releases’ him, causing his apparent discomfort, like he has been awakened from a sort of dream walk.

“That was…” Robin starts, expression half-outraged half-amused. “… Cool, right?” Billy says, with a wolfish grin on his face. But Robin doesn’t seem exactly on the same mind. “I was about to say sick. And obviously a display of bullyism.” She points out, receiving a shrug in response. “Those two concepts are pretty similar, Buckley.” Billy states, as a matter of fact.

Truth is, he has never even asked to have a sick power like that. It’s dark and creepy, and constantly reminds him about when he himself was under the control of the Mind-Flayer. But he can’t do shit about it, so, better to just get the best of it and make it useful, somehow. And a power like that… it can be useful. American secret service understood that well.

“How does it feel?” Robin asks, out of nowhere. Billy gives her a perplexed look. The question is pretty simple, but it takes a lot to formulate a concrete answer to that.
“It’s like…” Billy’s voice trails off, hesitant. It’s strange to verbalize something so guttural and instinctive. He’s not sure he has the right words to describe it. “…It’s like, our minds are linked. But not like I can read thoughts like El, no. They feel like empty shells that I can fill.”

Robin shivers a little. “Creepy.”
“…I know.” No point in denying that.

A small silence follows. Billy is not exactly proud of what he did with his power. He’s not proud of what he can do with it, either. The look the people under his control have, that look is something that he can’t stop dreaming about in the night. Empty shells that he can fill.

They get so deeply focused on their thoughts that they don’t hear Liz’s arrival. She trots cheerfully to them and talks with a high-pitched voice, interrupting their train of depressive thoughts.

“Hey, Robin!”

Robin almost jumps in surprise. It’s cute, and comical. She resembles Steve when she’s nervous, and it looks like Liz has the power to make her nervous easily.

The red-head then turns her head to Billy, showing a wide smile, cheeks slightly flushed. “Billy! Oh my god, I’m so glad you’re back. Robin was worried sick!” she chirps, causing the apparent indignation in the other girl. “I wasn’t worried sick!” the blondie replays, too fast and with a high-pitched voice. Billy grins all teeth and pinches her cheek, making her even more flustered and red instantly.

“Awww, worried about me, Buckley? That’s cute.”

“Shut up, asshole!” Robin pushes him away, under the laughter of her girlfriend. Well, Billy guesses they’re girlfriends. It’s not that he has had the time to inquire about it, since he has got back from a freaky lab about two days before.

“What happened to your leg? What happened to you?” Liz asks then, moving her brown doe eyes on Billy, scanning him pensively. He hastily calculates that maybe this is the right chance to start spreading a rumor about his disappearance that could placate everybody’s nosiness once for all. So, he decides to go for something boring.

“I was in the hospital. Uhm… Mononucleosis.”

Shit. That’s kind of stupid. Do people go to the hospital for mononucleosis? It’s not that Billy knows anything about illnesses, like, in general. Every time he went to the hospital was due to his father kind caring. And he doesn’t even have a decent medical insurance, obviously.

It’s clear that Liz isn’t very convinced. So, he needs to fix it, somehow.

“…And meningitis.” He adds, then, dumbly.

Now it looks plausible enough to Liz, apparently. She sighs theatrically, binging a hand to her mouth.

“Oh god, I’m so sorry!” but still, her appetite for news isn’t feed yet. “…What about your leg?” she inquires, then, moving her sight to Billy’s bad leg.
Yeah, shit, the leg. He has almost forgotten about it.

“Fell from the stairs.” He just declares, with a firm voice. Jesus, if this girl weren’t Robin’s woman, he would surely start to find her bitchy and way too demanding. But, it’s not that he has a right range of tolerance towards people, like, in general. Maybe that’s why he’s not the friendliest person either.

Robin decides to support his made-up lame story. “Yeah, they’re like, totally different events. Not correlated.” She adds, rubbing the back of her neck awkwardly.
Everything sounds way too stupid and fake. Billy can tell.

Liz nods, pensive. “I see.” …And looks like she has finally finished with her damned third grade. Alleluia!

“Well-” she turns to Robin, smiling timidly at her, maybe because she’s in the presence of Billy or something. Does she know about him? Him and… Steve? Billy really wishes Robin hadn’t told his personal stuff to the four winds, he has enough nosy woman in his life with Max, who can’t avoid scooping her nose into other people’s business.

“…See you after school?” she inquires. Robin giggles, looking a lot like a little girl in love, and moves a strand behind her ear. “Yeah, sure. Catch you later.” They stare at each other for a while, and Billy actually knows that look too well. It’s the kind of look that says, ‘I want to badly kiss you, but I can’t because we are in public’, and goddamn if he can relate. Besides, those two are definitely together, now Billy can tell.

Liz sends a heartfelt smile to Billy. “See you, Billy. I’m glad you’re back and fine.” He mumbles something in response, vaguely taken off guard by too much kindness. He doesn’t know how to act. He knows how to flirt and how to fight, not how to be goddamn nice without sexual implications, that’s for sure.
After that, Liz trots away, leaving a scent of strong floral perfume, almost sickening, to Billy’s mind.

He moves his sight on Robin, who’s smiling dumbly looking at the distancing figure of her girlfriend. She notices that she’s under serious scrutinizing after a while, squirming awkwardly on her spot and trying to get back some demeanor.

“What?!” she spats, now way too flustered. Billy decides that he can play a little bit about it. He starts to walk with the crouches, flanked by her. “Nothing… I was wondering…” his voice voluntarily trails off, just to make his friend impatient. “You were wondering… what?!” she urges, already pissed by his game.
Billy grins wolfishly at her and stops walking, just to make a show.

“…Did you eat her pussy?”

As expected, Robin’s reaction is hilarious. She turns red as a tomato and gasps in shock and amusement. “Jesus, Hargrove! Why the fuck were you wondering that?!” she asks, playfully pushing his shoulder. Billy shrugs and resumes walking. “Nothing, I’m a curious guy.”

Then, he sends her an inquisitive gaze.

“Come ooon, Buckley, don’t be a chaste priss. Give me some details.” She scoffs, cocky. “In your wet dreams, Hargrove.” She retorts, but her voice doesn’t sound venomous, above all, it sounds like she’s trying to keep back her amusement, masking it with a fake pretense of decency.

Billy invades her personal space and brings his face close to hers, adding some other discomfort to the already present. He has a talent with that, he must admit.
“So, I guess it is a yes?”

This time, she can’t help it, she burst into laughter and pushes him again. “You know what? You’re the worst, Hargrove! Goddamn, you and the dingus make seriously the most perfect couple that I have ever seen, because you’re BOTH dumbasses of the biggest dimensions, pedestrians with a brain small as a…” “It’s a YES!” Billy interrupts her, just to burst into a high-pitched cackle. He pokes her arm, grinning maliciously. “It’s definitely a yes! You naughty, naughty girl!” At this, Robin goes even redder; she grips her hair in exhaustion and groans aloud.

It's too funny to tease her and get her flustered. Sure, the girl has a big talent on tolerating his continuous tormenting her, Billy must admit. But, in the end, she likes it. Between him, drawing on her notepad, him, distracting her in the library, him, getting her flustered and embarrassed… yeah, Robin deserves a price for her patience.
The scene is happy and light-hearted, and obviously, it can’t last long.

A tall, robust boy is standing now in front of them, looking intensively at Billy’s figure with an unreadable expression on his face. Billy tries not to flinch at his apparition; his face looks still swollen and full of bruises, he has scars from stitches on his front and his cheekbones, and the nose has a new hump, clearly fixed after it has been broken.
Chris Robinson doesn’t look good, that’s for sure, but he doesn’t look that bad either. Billy really believed that he had killed him, after all.

They stay silent for a while in what looks like a Mexican standoff.

Robin shifts uncomfortable next to Billy, and he can almost smell her raising preoccupation. But the boy in front of them seems oddly calm, even collected.

“Hargrove. A word?” he just asks, flat voice. Billy feels the apprehensive gaze of his friend on him, but his eyes are pointed at Chris and no one else.

It’s strange. A mix of feelings is going on in his guts. He still despises the dude; he’s one of the biggest assholes he has ever met. But, next to it, there’s a strong, raging sense of guilt he feels toward him, a guilt that he can hardly ignore. Surely Chris didn’t deserve what he got. And the officers have told that he’s not going to press charge too, unexpectedly.

So. Maybe it’s good to have a little chit-chat.
“Right.” Billy nods. “Outside?”

Robin gasps and exhales a weak sound of protest, but Billy totally ignores her. Chris twists of his feet, clearly sure to be followed. Billy is about to do it, when Robin grips his bicep, forcing him to look at her worried face. “Billy…” “It’s ok, Buckley. I’ll catch you later.” He doesn’t leave her more time to protest that he has already started to follow the other boy. He hears a groan on his back, clearly, Robin isn’t too enthusiastic about being left behind.

She’s kind of right, though. It could be an ambush, secretly planned by Chris to finally kill him and get his revenge. But for some strange reason, Billy feels confident. Sure, he really hopes that the guy wants to actually talk and nothing else, because he really doesn’t want to use that creepy power on him again, and he’s not in the shape for a fight either.
Billy struggles to keep Chris’ gait, receiving a stern look by him. “The fuck happened to your leg, Hargrove?” he inquires, darting his eyes to the leg, just for a moment. What the fuck is with people asking him things today?!

“Fell from the stairs.” By now, it has become the standard bullshit. Of course, Chris doesn’t drink it. He scoffs while opening the entrance door. “Sure.” he spats, sour.
They reach the bleachers, now empty. There is a chilly breeze

outside, and Billy isn't wearing enough layers, as usual. Just his jeans jacket and a shirt, but he tries not to show how the wind concerns him.

Chris is voluntarily keeping his gaze away from him. He presses his back on a pole and slowly lights a cigarette. Billy decides that is better to imitate him, so he reaches his pack in the pocket of the jacket and takes off one for himself. When he presses the cigarette on his lips, Chris is about to light it for him, but Billy promptly does it by himself, finding an irritated sparkle in the boy's look due to the excessive pride of Billy.

They finally look at each other. Chris doesn't seem awkward or hesitant. He's a hot-blooded guy, Billy can understand. But he also can understand that this is not about continuing their challenge, their fights. This is about clarify, maybe even forgiveness. Chris Robinson would have never tried to 'help him' light up the cigarette, otherwise. Would have never talked all calm to him.

Chris diverts his gaze and sucks a long drag of smoke, looking pensively at nothing in particular. "…I owe you an apology." He states, after a while.
Again, Billy doesn't flinch, or twitch, or even react at this. He's not surprised, for some strange reason. He inhales some smoke too, taking all the sweet time in the word. Looks like Chris is waiting for him to speak, but Billy wants to hear what he has to say next. The boy speaks again after what seems an eternity.

"I was angry and fucked up. I couldn't accept the idea that Liz has dumped me, and I took it on you. But you had nothing to do with that."

Billy shivers a little, he doesn't know if it is from the cold or from other reasons. Chris, in front of him, sighs. He can see the boy running a hand on his hair, in a gesture of stress. Maybe he's faking his nervousness. Billy can understand that too, what does it mean to have to always wear a mask of confidence and strength. That mask starts to wear you, after a while.

"I saw you… speaking to Liz, before."
Jesus. Was this guy spying on them? Creepy.

Another sigh, again. Billy is still avoiding eye contact with him. Chris resumes to speak after a while, and this time the fatigue and tiredness of his words are perfectly audible.
"…She seems happy. With your friend, Buck-… Robin."

Billy shoots him a surprised glance, then, he opens his mouth to protest, to deny, to defend Robin's reputation, but Robinson dismisses him with a wave of his hand. "Cut the crap, Hargrove. I know it, by now." his voice doesn't really leave space for discussions, so, Billy decides to do what he has been told and just stays silent.

"I'm… I'm ok with that." Chris' voice stutters a little while he declares it. Billy must repress the urge to squint at him. *It's not that she needs your permission, dude.* he finds himself strangely thinking. Strangely, because he's clearly spending too much time with Robin and the effects on his thoughts are starting to sprout.

"Also… I'm sorry if I started to spread that rumor on you." This time, the boy looks straight into Billy's eyes, firmly. Billy can't hide the surprise; this all apologizing thing is beyond unexpected. What the hell happened to this dude? Why is he now redeeming himself? Billy can't tell, but he sure as hell can relate. Sometimes you really must reach the bottom to start questioning yourself, your existence, your choices… then, you can start to dig underground or get your fucking shit together. Looks like emotional and physical pain has helped this guy to start growing a little. It's not like Billy feels different in any way, so it's now like he can judge him at all.

The disgust and repulsion he has felt for this guy mutate in something akin to respect. It's not easy to take responsibility and face your own shit; so Billy can't avoid admiring him for this.

Chris laughs bitterly and takes another drag. "I mean… how could anyone even suspect you being a fag? It's insane. I was really messed up, I guess." He says, gesturing towards Billy who tries not to flinch or show how he is affected by those words, considering how he had a cock right up his ass just the day before. "…Yeah, insane." He confirms, vaguely.
Chris drops the cigarette on the ground and stomps on it. "I guess I was really just trying everything to ruin you." He makes a dramatical pause, then, he lifts his eyes on Billy. "I'm sorry, man."

A few seconds of dense silence follow. Billy blows a long cloud of smoke, face in a serious frown.
"…Apology accepted."

He can feel something that resembles a little sigh of relief in the guy in front of him. They stare at each other, not knowing exactly what to do or what to say. The situation can precipitate and becoming awkward, because it's not like now they're friends or they ever going to be ones.
Just, maybe… acquaintances. People who tolerate each other.

Chris perceives the brief moment of uncertainty, so he soon starts to walk back to school, followed difficultly by Billy, who has finished his cigarette too, by now.
"So… I guess we won't have you on the court for a while." He tells, voice with a glimpse of irony, which is strangely out of character. It is the first time that Billy doesn't hear him saying something venomous.

"Guess not." He responds, trying to hide as best as he can the effort he has to put to stay at Chris' gait.

"Too bad." Chris opens the entrance door and stops on his spot, keeping it open wide with his feet, waiting for Billy to enter the building. For a moment, he doesn't know what to do, the idea of accepting the guy's help stings, especially since he doesn't want to have someone opening the door for him like he's a fucking pussy. But still, his movements are quite disabled now. In the end, he decides to surpass the threshold without thanking the guy. That could be the best compromise.

"You're a decent player." Chris states, with a half-smirk. Billy makes a face and rolls his eyes. "I'm an excellent, player." The other guy snorts out a laugh, then, his expression goes sour out of nowhere.

"I'm never going to like you. I still think you're full of shit."
Finally! Billy is actually relieved, because he can't stand when people are nice to him. Especially a dude that was an enemy just a few minutes ago.

"Ain't gonna like you either, Robinson. But maybe if you'll stop being

a pain in the ass, we will have a chance to win this year." This is the nearest thing akin to a compliment that Billy can give to the guy, because, well, he must admit, Chris makes a fine basketball player too. And it's not like he has met many in that shithole. And he, Billy, has practically grown playing basket with the boys of the block, in San Diego.

The guy grins, wolfishly. Billy finds himself wondering if he had had his teeth reconstructed, he clearly remembers them flying on the concrete asphalt in a puddle of blood, that infamous day where he has almost killed him.

"Sounds fair." He convenes, in the end, and Billy doesn't know if this could be the beginning of something akin to a friendship; perhaps not, but sure as hell, is the starting of a truce. And jeez, if he needed one.

Getting back on track requires a biblical effort.

The period that follows is pure hell for Billy, who finds himself busy catching up on the homework as he had never done in his life. It has never been too difficult for him to get good grades, even in Cali, due to his supposed 'cleverness'. But, to recover an entire month is just another story, and he is sure as hell determined to get graduated at the end of the school year.

Luckily, he has still got the job at Frank's workshop too, he really needs money if he's going to do that coast-to-coast journey with Steve, after graduation.
Robin eventually agrees to take part of it too, asking to involve her girlfriend as well. When she tells it to Billy, he needs to mask his enthusiasm at the news in order to avoid looking like a freaking pussy. Truth is, he fucking loves the girl, but he would never be able to express it verbally, or maybe he would when intoxicated by alcohol or other substances, when he loses some of his inhibitions and goes soft.

Robin is great; and she's also his guardian angel or something. Billy finds himself building a kind of trust for the girl that he hasn't had on people in a while. They are accomplices, partners in crime, and he's

grateful to himself to have let her enter into his life. Sometimes, just choosing the right people to keep around you is a gift you can do for yourself.
Max is in full bitching-momma mode, but she's kind of cute, though. She has been so protective and nice toward him after all that shitstorm of the Mind-Flayer, and Billy starts to realize how much he loves that little shit too, even if she's still insolent and infuriating. On the third day since his great return from his vacancy at the five-stars crazy-lab hotel, he finds some spare hours to bring her to Indianapolis at the skate shop and tells her to choose a board. Obviously, her first reaction is to simply shock; while he tries extremely hard to hide how uncomfortable he feels about it. Doing nice things is something that he can't do, he simply doesn't know how to, exactly as well as talk about his feelings or those kinds of girly bullshits.

What should he say? 'Here, Max. Pick a board, it's a present for you because I think you're a lovely sister and I feel so grateful toward you that I wish to do something nice for you in return to prove it.' HELL, NO.

So, he treats her 'like shit', as usual, but she goddamn knows well that is just how he is and she knows well too to not to comment on his 'kind gesture' in order to avoid making him embarrassed. However, outside the shop, she encircles her tiny arms on his torso and sinks her red head on his chest. Billy's heart kind of makes a strange twitch, while one hand goes in auto-mode behind her back, and the other caresses her soft hair. However, he snarls 'Don't sweat it, shitbird', but just to keep up his usual façade.
El visits him in the void, sometimes. It's annoying; because he fucking told her not to do it, especially since she tends to do it in the evening, when he can finally rest in his room… but it's also nice, because she really wants to look after him and see how he's doing. Sometimes they speak for something like half an hour, just about trivial stuff. It's stupid, and it should be embarrassing. He's chatting with a freaking little girl about his personal stuff! But for some strange reason, it isn't. It's good. It's nice.
Their bond has grown when he had been enclosed in a small space, having El in his mind as the only friendly company. Also, she's the only one like him. A person with insane mind powers. It makes him

feel more normal, more human.

His home, also, has never been this calm and peaceful. It's a mystery, but looks like Neil is simply ignoring him. Like they're strangers under the same roof, and Billy can't find anything wrong in that. It has never been like this, so, for Billy, it is a completely new kind of treatment. Neil has always been a control freak toward him, always inquisitive, always suspicious. Now, it's like he's simply letting him live his life, trying to stay outside of it.

Billy doesn't know if it's some sort of sick game, if the man will be back being the usual self eventually, but for now, jeez if he doesn't want to enjoy that temporary peace.
Besides, it's not that he spends much time at home. Apart from school and the afternoons at Frank's, he's, unfortunately, always studying with the help of Robin. Sometimes he's at her place, but most of the time they're at Steve's, even when the owner of the house isn't really there. It's like Steve's place has become the headquarters for him, Robin and Liz. They practically live there; Billy's clothes are all over the house, followed by the ashtrays full of cigarette butts, the records of his favorite bands, even a few books from school. Well, Steve doesn't complain about the mess, so it's ok. Unlike Robin, who's always bitching about it.

"If you think we're gonna keep this kind of attitude on our van, you're delusional." she spats, out of patience, her hands on her hips and an annoyed frown on her face. She's looking around her at the messy living room, full of unfinished cans of beer, pizza cartons, cigarette and joint butts. Billy shrugs noncommittally, keeping his reading, sprawled loosely on the couch. "That was my idea first, Buckley. I could always dis-invite you, sweetheart." She scoffs, cocky. "You two idiots won't survive a day without me, Hargrove."
Well, she's kind of right. Billy decides to give it to her by remaining silent. Silence means yes.

Sometimes they have dinner or simply evenings all together, with Liz too and Nancy and Jonathan. When there is Jonathan, they usually get super involved in long music discussions, alienating from the rest of the world for hours and listening to their favorite records. Billy must admit that even Nancy isn't too bad either, after all. Clearly, he can't show it. He still needs to act cocky and sometimes switch in

alpha mode with her to prove the chick who's the boss, but it's like Nancy has started to stop being offended about it, it's like she has understood that's just how he acts, as a standard.

Then, there is Steve. Too perfect and too good to be real. Billy, sometimes, really needs to repeat to himself that no, this is not a dream. This is happening for real. Because, not being used to good stuff in his life means a natural distrust when those things happen. A cautious suspect, like trying to be prepared for the usual ton of shit that must be behind the corner, ready to strike.

Billy learns how to lower his defense, how to accept happiness again. After four days from his return, he's at Steve's place, in the late afternoon. They're on the couch, sprawled in relaxation. He tells Steve that he can't stay much; he has really too much to do. But Steve just kisses him, chaste, and gives him a lazy smile.

"It's ok, babe. I just wanted to give you something." he announces, moving in another room to reach that supposed 'something'. Billy can't help but blink in surprise, this is quite unexpected. Has Steve bought something for him? Why? His birthday is in a few weeks. Maybe it's their… month-versary? What it should be, like, four months? Jesus, he hasn't much experience in the matter and he's really, really not the type for this bullshit. This is awkward.

Soon, Steve is back with a blue paper package, so, yep, this is definitely a present. He tries to disguise his discomfort as the best he can, but Steve notices instantly, obviously. He chuckles and kisses Billy's cheek, causing a weak sound of protest in him.

"Don't worry. I just wanted to give you this. You didn't have to buy me anything. It's not… about any recurrence. Just a thing for you." Steve reassures, caressing Billy's face with a light touch. Billy makes a face. "I'm bad with this kind of shit, Harrington." He declares, causing another small laugh in his boyfriend.
"Open it. Come on."

Billy swallows and starts to unpack the present. It's not that is difficult to understand what it is: clearly something to dress. But this doesn't make it any less… strange. The whole thing. The whole situation.

Billy grabs the content of the package and lifts it to have a better look at it. It's a sweater, it's dark grey and soft to the touch. Must be wool or some fancy shit.
Billy stares at the sweater for something like 30 seconds, until Steve starts to feel awkward. He rubs the back of his neck and his voice comes out stuttering and unsure.

"It's just… makes me mad that you never dress up properly for the cold of Indiana! You're a goddamn peacock, you know that? So, I thought, that maybe… maybe if I gave you a sweater as a present, you would have worn it for, like, for social reasons." He mumbles, chuckling nervously. Billy is still staring at the garment, then, he moves his eyes on Steve, blinking in a way that must look really dumb.

Steve continues babbling, now clearly in the throes of anxiety, his voice raises to a high-pitched tone while he gesticulates whit emphasis.
"I mean, it was Robin's idea, to be honest. Uhm, I don't know If you ever gonna wear it. I know it's not your style, I mean, I like your style! I don't want you to change it! You're hot shit, you know? It's just…" Billy is still speechless, and Steve is getting more and more flustered. It's fucking adorable.

"Oh my god! You hate it! You hate it, right? Jesus, I'm so stupid…"

A wide grin gradually starts to spread on Billy's face while he assists Steve's spiraling into self-doubt. He decides to shush the boy with a kiss, bringing his arm around his neck, the soft, warm sweater still gripped into his hand.

Steve makes a surprised sound on his mouth, but then, he moves his hands on Billy's back and the kiss transforms into something more heated. When they part to gain back some air, Billy grins on the other boy's chin.

"You're a dork, Steve Harrington."

Steve can't respond with anything else than a laugh at Billy's trademark way to call him.

Steve's present is so sweet and toothachingly considerate that he could almost cry in another universe. Granted, the idea of giving him a fucking sweater, of thinking about his wellbeing, makes him feel like he's been treated like a chick. Like Steve's girlfriend. It should be irritating, but for some strange reason is just flattering. Moreover, Billy recognizes that he has too many prejudices on the matter, he knows that he needs to work on it.

"You like it?" Steve inquires, moving a hand on Billy's neck. Billy needs really to bite back the effect that those eyes have on him at that moment. Those big, doe eyes… are watching him with something akin to simply adoration. And Billy craves it, he wants to be adored, to be praised, to be revered by the boy. It's like he now must recover from all the lack of affection he had in his life.

"I love it." he declares, looking back straight to Steve's eyes at a barely few inches from his face. Steve smirks in a way that resembles the old King Steve more than the usual self. A cocky, confident smile. He has now started to play with a strand of Billy's hair while the other hand moves on his hip.

"Are you gonna wear it for me?" he asks in a flirty tone. Billy licks his lips and flutters his eyelids in a way that he knows will go straight to Steve's cock.
"I'm gonna give you a reward, now, Stevie." He declares, before attempting Steve's neck and sliding his hand on the guy's thigh.

The day after, he wears the sweater in school, finding the obvious mocking comments in Robin. "Shut the fuck up, Buckley." It's all he says to her, hiding his blushing face away from that witch.

Things with Steve are great. Maybe it's just because they're at the beginning of something that is gradually building up, maybe it's just the usual heat of the first months. But damn, if Billy doesn't feel like he's in heaven with him. There's natural electricity between them, a chemical affinity that bonds them indissolubly. Sometimes, it is like their minds are linked. Sometimes, Billy finds himself thinking that it's like he was meant to meet and get together with the boy.

They spend all time they can together. Sometimes they get high and

watch movies, sometimes they cook, or, well, Steve does, sometimes they argue, sometimes they flirt, bust most of all… sex. They do a lot of sex, like the good horny teenagers they are. Both their minds go wild when they're in proximity of each other, so, yeah, basically they fuck like primates every time they can.

Billy can't tell which one of them is the worst, basically, they're fucking animals, as Robin can't get tired to tell. But, yeah, Billy couldn't be happier. He had plenty of experiences in the matter with Nathan, but at the time he was naïve and extremely repressed in terms of facing his raging homosexuality. So, every sexual intercourse was faced with burning shame, even if Nathan had been like a mentor for him and had given him a lot of pleasure (he must admit it).

Now, there's no fucking place for shame anymore. For the first time in his life, he doesn't feel *bad* about it, he can explore with Steve, free. It's so good to discover new things together, Steve has a sexual appetite, fantasy and enthusiasm that really couldn't ever bore Billy. Tsk. Figures. The guy is a 'perv', actually, but of the good type. And he is no exception, after all.

"Shit!"
"Fuuuck…"

They hiss in unison when Billy takes Steve's cock with a firm, decisive downward movement. It's a lot; he can't deny. The raging pressure goes straight to his spine with a jolt, even his legs get tenser, for a moment. He grits his teeth and clenches Steve's shoulders, probably even hurting him but fuck! If it isn't too much.

Steve's hands are caressing his thighs, soothing, while the boy is scrutinizing him with an apprehensive look.

"Ok?" he inquires, sounding genuinely worried. Billy lets out a long exhale and nods, loosening the tight grip on Steve's shoulders a little.
"Ok… it's just… it's just so much." He mumbles, almost sheepishly. Steve brings a hand on Billy's cheeks and caresses it with the usual sloppy tenderness, while the other hand is still sliding on Billy's leg.

“Feels amazing, though.” He declares, with a playful smile. Billy hums, still not moving an inch of his body. He almost feels like he could break. “Feels split in a half.” He spits, half-joking, finding the usual instant over-apprehension of his boyfriend.

“Oh god. You want to stop? Billy, are you ok? Hey, look at me. Tell me you’re ok.”
Billy groans at these words.

“Steve, babe, calm down, ok? Just… just give me a minute, will ya?”

Steve nods vigorously, almost comically. He then leans forward to kiss Billy, and the boy finds instant comfort in those lips. His body loses tension too as an automatic response, while the kiss becomes more heated and passionate. Soon, he finds himself starting to move without even noticing it. Slowly, tentative, downwards… the pressure is unbearable, and what comes out from Steve’s mouth is one of the filthiest moans ever. He tightens the grip on Billy’s tights in reflex.

“Fuck… shit… this is so… fuuck…” The brunette’s brain can’t process other words from noncoherent curses, apparently, but it’s not much different for Billy either. He gives his body the time to adjust, to get used to it, craving what will come next.

When he can finally properly ride Steve, they both must bite their own lips to hold back themselves. After all, all their friends are still downstairs, celebrating all together while they have escaped without being noticed in Steve’s room.

It all started due to Billy’s fault. He must admit, he has teased the poor guy too much all over the evening. Flirting lasciviously and obscenely in front of everyone, invading his personal space continuously, sending him malicious glances. He had licked Steve’s fingers while he was making the cream, he had eaten cookies in the most flirtatious mode, he had given him the best grins and the best flatteries until the poor guy couldn’t resist anymore.
Well, it has been extremely funny, seeing Steve all flustered for him. He did a splendid job, after all.

When Billy has solemnly announced to him that he was going to his room, Steve had finally given up with cooking and had followed him,

wary to not be noticed, since he's the kitchen master tonight or something.

Probably Steve thought about a quickie, a hand or a blowjob, but no, Billy had a better plan for him. The idea of riding him has been stuck in his mind for weeks, but for some strange reason, it hadn't happened, until now. Well, isn't it a good way to start the new year? A great one, actually.
Steve is panting hard now, as Billy is bouncing on his hips, frantically chasing his pleasure. He can feel Steve bucking his hips in a rough, coordinated battle of thrusts, and that's it. They have found the perfect pace and the perfect angle, and they are both aware they're not gonna last long, like this.
"Steve… ah, touch me. Make me come. Please." Billy tells, voice cracked and messed up. He's getting bolder and bolder when it comes to dirty talking, a prerogative that used to be Steve's specialty.
Steve manages to laugh, satisfied. "Since you asked so nicely…" Billy would talk back with something venomous to this in normal circumstances, but now his mind is completely overwhelmed and what he manages to do is just a small grunt. When Steve's hand goes to his dick and starts to stroke it, he actually sees starts. There's a perfect, sublime balance between Steve's touch and the thrusts into him.

"Yeah… that's it. You're beautiful, baby. Come, come for me, Billy. I love you, I love you so much."

And he does. Hard and for what seems an eternity, under Steve's soft voice, under his saying 'I love you', eyes boring into his, sight entangled in an intense gaze. He lets out a muffled whimper, biting his lip to silence himself, and Steve's pace goes faster, chasing his own climax.

Billy leans down to kiss him. He swallows Steve's orgasm, feeling the hot liquid sprouting inside him, filling him.

They stay like this for a while, forehead to forehead, gaining breath in the aftermath of their orgasms. Suddenly speechless and motionless. Then, they kiss again, Steve cups Billy's cheeks and kisses him almost with desperation, urgency.

“I love you. I love you so much.” He whispers, and there’s a strange, distorted tone of melancholy in his voice, the bitter mixed feeling that carries the weight of love. Billy can relate. He kisses him back, breath still frantic, while he can feel his boyfriend’s cock going soft inside him.

“I love you too. I wish I could show it how much I do.” He tells him, on his mouth. And it is strange, because usually, he’s not too much into saying those kinds of things, his brain resists expressing verbally his feelings because he’s an emotionally awkward person, after all. But, damn… his mind is dizzy now, so his tongue runs without control.
Steve swallows and presses his lips on Billy’s temple, a gesture that he does remarkably often. Billy doesn’t despise it. He adores it, actually. Those small, kind gestures… it makes him feel loved. Blessed, even.

They finally part. Billy gets with his back on the mattress with an annoyed groan, feeling the dried cum all over his legs. Ugh. Steve stretches on the side of the bed to get the tissues and wipes himself clean as the best he can. Then, he reaches the tissues to Billy, moving to lay on his flank.

Billy looks at the tissues, hesitant. Then, he makes a face.

“Actually… I think… I should take a shower.” He declares, almost sheepishly. Seriously, he can’t face the idea of having Steve’s dried spunk on his legs all night long. That thing is sticky and gets super annoying with body hair. Steve smirks and ‘boop’ his nose with his index. “Poor thing… I got you all dirty down here.” Billy groans and pushes him. “Shut up, Harrington.”

“No, seriously.” Steve snaps, now looking over-enthusiastic. “Why did we never try this before? I mean… the pressure, the tightness… damn, it was amazing!” he talks gesticulating with emphasis, causing Billy’s chuckles in response. “I had the idea back in my mind. Dunno, guess we just needed the right occasion, didn’t we, pretty thing?” Steve laughs too and starts to slide a finger on Billy’s forearm, slowly and tenderly. Then, he speaks with his eyes pointed on his own hand, pensively.

“I mean… it’s always amazing. Don’t get me wrong. With you… I don’t know. You just blow my mind completely. You’re… damn. You’re sooo good to me.”

Billy laughs at the flattery. “I know, I’m hot shit, right?” he jokes. Steve lifts his gaze on him and scoffs. “I don’t want to feed more your gigantic ego, asshole. But… yeah. I guess you are.” They share chuckles and clumsy kisses, sloppy and tender like two birdies in love, when a loud bang on the door makes them jump on their spot, like they have been awakened from a particularly intense dream and, well, for Billy, it kinda feels like it.

They suddenly remember that they’re still naked, Billy’s legs half-covered in dried cum, on the bed.

Robin’s voice comes out from the other side of the door, and she sounds pissed. Well, at least, there’s a good reason for that, since she has been abandoned in cooking without Steve’s supervision.

“Guys! I don’t know if you’re finished or what, but Liz has just burnt the lentils, and we have no idea how to set up the oven for the roast so get your asses downstairs!”
Steve hastily collects his clothes and dresses in a hurry. “Sorry, Rob! I’ll be there in a minute!” he shouts towards the door. Billy looks at him with an amused smirk on his face, still laying tranquilly on the bed with his elbows pointed on the mattress. He can’t help but think how cute Steve is when he’s this flustered.

The boy presses a last, quick peck on his lips before leaving the room, his shirt wrong buttoned but, hey, why should Billy tell him? And ruin the fun? Naah. He doesn’t think so.
He decides to get in the shower. He hears Steve’s stuttering voice over the door saying to Robin: “I wasn’t… we weren’t…”, so, he exploits the right moment to exit Steve’s room completely naked, just a towel on hips to cover his junk. “Buckley.” He greets the girl, grinning wolfishly while passing through them.

He can’t see Robin’s reaction to the scene, since he’s already giving her his back, but he can actually *feel* her eyes rolling at his show, while Steve lets out the loudest groan.

Steve makes the stairs in a rush, running a hand into his disheveled hair and trying to gain back some demeanors to not look like someone who has just had a great fuck.
He can feel Robin's snarky gaze on his figure, feeding more the crepitant heat on his neck, but he promptly chooses to ignore it. He bolts into the kitchen, finding the poor Liz fumbling clumsily at the stoves with Nancy and Jonathan on her side. She squirms on her spot at Steve's sight, flustered.

"Steve! Oh my god I'm so sorry… I think I kinda made a mess here!" she cries out. Steve chuckles and rubs the back of his neck awkwardly. "No need to worry, Liz. It's my fault, actually, since I vanished out of nowhere."

Nancy and Jonathan are giving him 'the look': the one that makes clear how they perfectly know he was hooking up with his boyfriend, but there's no reproach in their eyes, on the contrary, they look quite amused. Yeah, looks like Steve's embarrassment is always endearing. A comical show.

"Where's Billy?" Nancy inquires, almost sadistically, gaining a complicit glance by Robin, who leans her back on the counter and scrutinizes Steve with her trademark sassy-expression.

Steve clears his voice and answers too fast. "Shower. He's… taking a shower." Liz, who has been too involved with the burned lentils now glued to the bottom of the pan, looks at Steve and shoots him a confused glare. "Why is he having a shower… now…?"

Jesus Christ!

This girl is cute, really, but her naivety is sometimes frustrating. Steve becomes red as a tomato and decides to totally ignore the previous question, under the entertained chuckles of his assholes friends.

"Yeah! Uhm, AS I SAID, lentils are a very old Italian tradition for the New Year's Day, they mean luck and fortune, like, monetary fortune..." he stutters, high-pitched voice, moving to the stoves to start to take control of the situation and, most of all, to avoid the other's mocking glares.

Midnight has passed for a while.

They're currently watching the starry sky of the quarry, lazily passing each other boozes of JD and Tequila, under a stream of drunk, uncontrolled chit-chats. Obviously, they had shared a few joints as well, so now Steve feels pleasantly buzzed and high. His mind is floating and lightweight, and maybe is just the alcohol and the drug in his blood, but he feels like he has never been this happy and complete in his life.

He's seated on the grass, elbows pointed on his knees, while Billy is laying on his side next to him. Robin is on his left, laughing at something Nancy has just said.

"What are your good resolutions for the next year?" Nance inquires, out of nowhere, finding different reactions in her friends. Robin lifts her booze in the air and responds with a cracked, high-pitched voice that reeks of alcohol. "Graduate and get the fuck out of Hawkins!" she finds the enthusiastic approval of Liz in that, while Jonathan has a pensive frown on his face, like he's thinking about the right words to answer his girlfriend's question.

"I dunno… I guess… try to be less socially awkward?" he admits, after a while. Everybody laughs at that, while Nancy throws clumsily an arm on his shoulder. "Aww, isn't he cute?!" she jokes. Steve feels somehow the need to reassure Jonathan. "Don't worry, Jon. We're all weirdos here." But, of course, Billy pushes him on the shoulder at these words. "Speak for yourself, pretty boy!"

Giggles and hollering follow by. This is good, how everyone feels lighthearted and carefree tonight. It's just them, six freaks in the middle of nowhere, talking bullshit under a big, starry sky. Steve hasn't felt this free in a while.

"How about you, Billy?" Nancy asks then, turning to the blonde, a few meters from her. Billy shrugs and takes a sip from his JD noncommittally. "Can't tell. There's nothing that I want to change in my life right now." he admits, and, even if he talks like he doesn't give a shit, that's kind of a pretty big statement.

“I’ve got one resolution for you. How about you start to be less of a dickhead this year?” Steve jokes, causing the general laughs in response. Billy makes a face, wrinkling his nose in pretended annoyance, and then, he spats out the standard replay: “Screw you, Harrington!”, causing even more chuckles in the others.

It’s great how, in the end, everyone is getting along well. Robin hated Nancy in the beginning, but then, she had learned how to get to know her and discovered how prevented she was about her persona.

Damn, even Billy is on good terms with everyone! It sounds like a miracle. He’s almost, *almost* friend with Nancy, too.

That is so good. Sure, Steve doesn’t give a shit about what other people think, but he couldn’t stand the idea of Billy being misunderstood by everyone, being misread as nothing more than a gigantic douchebag. Maybe he’s still not the nicest person in the world, so what? Sometimes there are people that require some effort to be discovered, Billy is one of them. In the end, it’s worth it.

Steve is so glad to never have given up on him. He’s glad of his own stubbornness.
“What’s going on in that pretty little head of yours?”

Billy’s question comes to his right, snapping him out of his reverie. Steve turns to him, the only light is the one made by the stars and the feeble flames of the candles that Robin has brought (candles! Definitely her style). Even in the dim light, Billy looks gorgeous to Steve. His bright blue eyes are almost glowing in Billy’s sarcastic and curious frown.
Steve shrugs casually. “Nothing. Why?” “Na-ha. You’ve been zoning out a lot lately. Care to share?” He’s grinning, maliciously. It’s incredible how, even if now that it’s about months they’re together, Billy has always the power to shift Steve in some sort of nervousness, as if they have just started dating.

Steve gulps. It’s not like he can say to Billy that he was thinking about how happy he is about the fact that he has become friends with everyone, so, he just decides to divert the topic.

“Nothing, just… I’m cold.” He states, randomly, while his boyfriend

squints at him, perplexed. Robin turns to Steve, still laughing at something he hasn't quite caught.
"There are blankets in the car. Would you be a lamb and take one for us too? I'm freezing my butt, to be honest." She spats, mumbling in evident drunkenness. "Right away." Steve jumps on his feet, pointing a palm on his knee to help the movement.

He leaves the trail of laughs and hollering behind while he walks toward his car, mind dizzy for the sudden change of settings. When he gets back, he throws a blanket to Nance, followed by Robin. He keeps the third one for himself, steady in his grip while he clumsily seats leg crossed on the grass.

"You cold, big boy?" he asks, snarky, to Billy, who's laying on the grass in the exact pose where Steve has left him thirty seconds before. Billy makes a face and responds petulantly. "Naah… I'm hot-blooded. Keep your pussy blanket for yourself, princess." At these words, Steve can't avoid rolling his eyes in annoyance. "Suit yourself. I'm sure this blanket won't attempt my virility, by the way." As to remark the concept, he wraps himself, feeling an instant sensation of delight by the warmth of the wool.

Billy lets out a cackle and pushes his shoulder. "Screw you, Stevie!"

"Actually…" Robin's chanting voice collects their attention. "Wouldn't be, like, cold-blooded? As the fish… they have cold blood, right? So, they don't suffer the cold because they're already cold!"

She's babbling. She's so drunk and so adorable. Steve laughs, tilting back his head. "I think you made a point." He convenes. Besides, it's not that he has any knowledge on the matter. It's not exactly the type of topic that he cares about.

Nancy intervenes, voice way too high due to the alcohol and with a façade of extreme seriousness, as if they're talking about something of primary importance. "No! It's the contrary. If you got hot blood, your body temperature is always high, if you got cold blood, you need to warm it up with the sun. Have you ever saw lizards? Hours, doing nothing… just baking up under the sun…chilling out…" her voice comes out sloppy and cracked while she gesticulates with emphasis at the explanation.

Billy snaps, enlightened by some sort of secret knowledge. “Shit! Maybe I am cold-blooded. This is why I’m dying in this shithole town where you have the sun two months per year.” Steve chuckles at that. “You’re still tanned though. How is that possible?” he inquires and, at this question, Billy blinks at him, almost dumbly. It’s strange, kind of out of character, but it looks like he has been taken off guard.

He takes a sip of his JD and clears his voice, then talks almost sheepishly. “Oh… uhm, it’s… it’s not exactly natural. I made a copy of the pool’s keys and sometimes I sneak in there to use the gym and the tanning bed.” he winces when he realizes that everybody’s eyes are pointed at him. Steve can’t tell, considering how dark it is, but sure as hell he is blushing hard now. How cute.

“W-What?! What’s gotten into you?!” he mumbles, suddenly all riled up. Robin talks with a sly smirk on her face. “You… made a copy of the pool’s keys and you are actually using their tanning bed secretly?” “Well… yeah… kind of.” Billy responds, voice faltering a little.

After a long, almost tense, pause of silence, everybody burst into laughter. Billy groans, but the corners of his mouth crack into a smirk too.

“What if they find out?! You have a record… Jesus, Hargrove… you’re the worst.” Steve jokes, wiping the tears from his eyes. Billy shrugs. “Pretty boy, if you want to be with me maybe you need to start thinking more like a criminal. Or, better, maybe you need to start thinking a little less, in general.” it comes out casually, but brings a lot with it. Steve’s expression goes more serious, collected, even if he’s still smiling.

“I could, yeah. Think less. Only if you will start thinking more.”

Billy grins, eyes darting sharply to Steve’s. For a moment, it’s just an intense entanglement of gazes. Then, he exhales, languidly, and takes another sip of his whisky. He speaks after what is felt as an eternity.

“…Deal.”

28. Epilogue: The world is yours

“I can’t believe you managed to drag me here.” Robin spats, clearly disgusted, wrinkling her nose in pure annoyance. Steve lets out a small cackle at that; she has a point. He would have never, never thought to be at the basketball court of Hawkins’ Highschool again in his life. And least of all to be there with Robin Buckley. But, well, aside from escorting him like a real friend, she has a good reason to be here, since Liz is on the court too… as a cheerleader. Looks like today is important for both of their partners, ironically.

“I know, right? Stranger things happen in Hawkins.” Steve jokes, moving his sight from his friend to the court again, looking at a certain blonde stealing the ball from the adversary, sneaky and quick. Clearly, Billy is the absolute star of the team, maybe of the entire situation, there. Figures. Nothing new, right? After all, he really is a great player, nothing to object about that.

“I don’t even understand the rules of this stupid game! Who’s winning?” Robin groans aloud, covering the hollering of the crowd of people seated on the bleachers alongside them. “Basically… they’re kicking their asses. Our team.” Is the honest and truthful answer of Steve. Robin nods, letting out a small ‘oh’ in surprise.

It’s kind of strange to look at the team from the bleachers, seeing Billy play from this distance. He was once part of that team too, when Billy used to annoy the hell out of him. To be there, as a spectator, it’s almost comical.

“Did I misunderstood things, or did I just see Billy high five Robinson?!” Robin gasps, making Steve laughing in response. “Yeah. They still despise each other, but they’re on good terms, now.” he briefly explains. His friend groans again, looking even more disgusted than before. “Jeez! Gross.” “I hear that.” Steve convenes, because, hell, that guy is still obnoxious to him and it’s still a mystery how Billy managed to get back to being friendly with the same teammates that had bullied him after practice just a few months ago.

“But having them collaborating, as a team, on the court…” Steve reflects, looking at the game absent-mindedly. “…Well, I must say:

they make a great duo. They're really going alpha down there." Robin almost gags at these words. "Yeah, I think I've seen enough display of toxic masculinity for the rest of my life, today."
Well, again. She has a point. As usual.

When Billy strikes the last pointer, all the crowd erupts in hollers and applause, jumping on their feet while clapping hands. Steve does the same, grinning proudly at his talented boyfriend who is now hugged and greets by his teammates. They all start to shout in unison his name, while Robin facepalms at the sight of the scene.

"Oh my god! Look at him. Enjoying his glory!" she snarls, now standing too, but just to have a better look at the show. The cheerleaders have joined the court too in a display of pure, stereotypical jock culture. Steve feels strange at the idea that he was a part of it in the past, it seems distant light-years from the person he is now.

"…Like a goddamn peacock." He convenes, laughing to his friend's statement but never stopping clapping his hands among the crowd. Robin, out of nowhere, grabs his bicep and points to Billy, now flanked by a blonde cheerleader who's encircling the boy's waist with her arm.
"Steve… I think that cheerleader has just kissed him. A peck on the lips." Robin declares, slightly alarmed. Steve just shrugs. "Who? That one? The blonde chick?" he vaguely inquires, not looking interested at the news at all. Robin squints at him, confused. "You're not… jealous?" she asks, almost sheepishly.

Steve can't help but scoff in response. "Naaah… he's just making a show. Probably trying to piss me off, too." Robin stares at his friend dumbfounded. Yes, it may sound strange from outside, Steve can tell. But he knows Billy too well now, after all, they have been together for a while and he can recognize his stupid mind tricks.

"Don't worry, Rob. It's just his game to make me mad. Failing miserably, though." Steve reassures, smiling. "…You know, he even told me that he kissed you, back when you two were pretending to be together, at his house…?" Robin recalls, Steve can tell. Her reaction is amusing: she gasps and widens her eyes, looking pure flustered.

“I wasn’t… We weren’t… that’s not true! It was an innocent peck to prove our fake relationship!” she whines, high-pitched voice. Steve laughs and throws an arm on her shoulders in camaraderie. “Hey! I know, ok? Don’t sweat it.” he receives a noncommittal hum in response by his blonde friend, clearly out of smartass remarks.

Finally, the crowd is gradually dissipating, climbing out of their seats and roaming towards the exit. The players are going to the showers too, never stopping to exchange banters and way-too-virile pats on the shoulders in pure, machismo attitude.

“We should wait for them outside.” Steve states, practical, finding the approval of his friend.

The first to show up is Liz. They all share a big, bear hug, but clearly, Robin and she don’t do anything remotely ‘suspicious’, since they’re in the school parking lot, under the risk of prying eyes.

Billy is nowhere to be seen, he’s probably still in the locker room with his teammates doing god knows what, maybe slapping their assess and sharing masculine sexual banters. Figures.

It’s kind of sad that Billy can’t be who he wants to be in front of other people, but it’s not that Steve can blame him. Hawkins is really a shithole town, and his dad is a full-grade psycho, even if Billy had told him that his old-man had stopped tormenting him since their confrontation in the cold, damp cell of the Hawkins’ Police Station, for some strange reason.

Perhaps Billy has been able to move something inside the guy’s guts, at least, this is how Steve has interpreted it, because otherwise there’s no possible explanation for Neil to stop being an asshole all of a sudden. Neil Hargrove… feeling guilty. Billy is in total denial about that; he thinks that his father isn’t capable of feeling something like that, because that would prove that he, deep down, gives a shit about his son and Billy can’t accept it, even mentally. The chance that his father cares about him, even in a twisted, sick way, would completely destroy him. Steve can relate. Damn, if he can!

Sometimes it’s easier to hate, to see our parents dead than to

humanize them. Truth is, some parents believe that they can dictate their son's lives to their liking, just because they feel that being parents is enough to gain complete control over a human being. They want to create small puppets, clones of their persons, their lifestyle, their way of thinking. In this, Steve and Billy have really a lot in common, when it comes to family.

But Steve knows that hate is never the right answer, too. He wants to learn how to stop being angry at his parents, even if he's not sure they deserve forgiveness, and he wishes Billy could do the same. They're just human, after all.

This deep, sad train of thought is interrupted by the sudden arrival of the team, stalking outside the parking lot all cheerful and excited. Billy has a wolfish grin plastered on his face, his hair is still damp from the shower and he has a duffel bag laying loosely on his shoulder. When he sees Steve, at a considerable distance, the world freezes for a moment. He smiles at him, not a smirk, but a kind, pure smile. Almost timid. Steve smiles back, crossing his arm on his chest while leaning on the Beemer while their eyes stay entangled in a heavy, intense gaze.

He sees Billy telling something to the others, then, the boy walks to them with a steady gait, one thumb hooked in the belt, looking cocky and smug as fucking usual.
"Hey ladies!" he chirps to Steve, Robin and Liz, placing himself in front of them. Steve can see the other teammates scrutinizing the scene at a considerable distance; so, clearly, they can't allow behaving suspiciously. Maybe this is why Billy looks the same old arrogant prick that Steve met two years before, at the moment. But now, Steve knows that is just a made-up show.

"Decent game you made there, Hargrove." Steve tells, grinning, keeping up Billy's alpha-wolf attitude. "Yeah, Billy! You did great!" Liz convenes, this time sweeter and nicer compared to Steve's tone. Billy sniffles and shrugs casually. "Thanks, sweet cheeks." He says to the girl, then, he moves his eyes on Steve, grinning ferine at him. "And, by the way, that was a majestic game, Harrington. Clearly we couldn't have done the same with you in the team."

Steve scoffs and throws his arms in the air, mocking exasperation.

“Jeez! Listen to him…” he mumbles to himself. Robin rolls her eyes while she couldn’t look more disgusted. “Seriously?! That was such a rare show of macho bullshit that I was about to throw up!”

At this venomous remark, Billy doesn’t protest or deny. He laughs, actually, as if he’s agreeing with Robin’s words in a subtext way.

“What are you going to do now…?” Steve asks his boyfriend. He seems to lose some confidence at this question. His grin disappears and for a moment he looks… sheepish. Steve joys internally: yeah, that expression is fucking cute.

Billy turns his head towards the teammates inquisitively, just to realize that now they’re talking to each other without paying attention to him. So, he can relax a little and loosens up that alpha jock façade.

“Uhm… we’re going to Robinson’s place to have a drink.” He explains, and it’s clear how he feels totally uneasy about it. It’s not even the first time: Billy sometimes hangs out with his teammates after practice, god only knows why, since they’re insufferable pricks. But Steve doesn’t want to be the control-freak boyfriend who tells him what he can do and what not; he doesn’t want to be clingy either. So, he respects Billy’s extremely questionable choices.

Billy shifts on his feet and speaks with uncertainty. “…Do you want to… join us?” but it’s clear how the question has been made just for courtesy. Robin scoffs at this, while Steve awkwardly rubs the back of his neck.

“Uhm… no thanks. So not my crowd.” He briefly explains, even if he doesn’t need to: Billy already knows that. The boy nods, and for a moment there’s something akin to preoccupation on his look.

“…I’ll see you later?” he inquires, timidly, with his brows furrowed. Steve’s heart almost twitches at this sight. He makes a small laugh. “Sure! I’ll see you later.”
Billy’s expression changes again, while the corners of his mouth crackle in a tiny smile. Now he looks almost relieved, and Steve would really like to kiss the hell out of him. Jeez! How can he be this cute?!

But, yeah, they're still in the parking lot of the school, and, yeah, Billy's teammates are still in the nearby, watching them with the corner of their eyes, so, better to behave.
Billy stays motionless in front of them, staring at Steve like he's thinking the same as him, so Steve decides to encourage him to move on.

"Now go on! Chop, chop, to your gorilla friends. Have fun, don't drink too much." He jokes, waving his hand to 'send' Billy to his teammates. The boy chuckles slightly and recovers his cocky façade.

"All right, mom!" he spats, grinning wolfishly to his boyfriend. "Adios, hombre!" he greets them then, starting to walk back to the others. Steve sees Robinson's inquiring gaze on them. The guy even nods in their direction, and Steve finds himself nodding back, just for courtesy.

He's still a loathsome dude, but, after all, it's good that Billy had been able to sort things out.

Casa Harrington goes silent without Billy or his friends and the brats in it.

It's strange, after the months of complete loneliness and decay that had been the aftermath of Nancy's broke up, Steve has found himself surrounded by people again like he hasn't had in so long. This time it wasn't a stupid crowd of superficial peers who revolved around him just for the parties he used to throw at his place. No, he has friends now, real ones who really care about him.

He had found himself suffering loneliness even more in contrast. Every time Billy can't stay for the night, he goes into this blunt state of melancholy and emptiness. It's almost a physical sensation; as if there were something missing in his body itself.

Here's the problem with being deeply, utterly in love: psychological dependency. Love is just socially accepted madness, after all. It creates two people who become addicted to each other, and, as every addiction does, alongside the joy there's the struggling of the cravings, the abstinence.

Steve thinks so while he's loosely sprawled on the couch, looking absently at a trashy tv show while taking small sips from his beer.

It's becoming late, and his eyelids are starting to feel heavy. When he hears the sound of the main door opening. He wakes up from his almost-sleepy state in a start. Billy is back, he has entered the house with his own keys, since it's been a while that they're practically sharing the same space together.

Steve lifts his head to the entrance of the living room to see his boyfriend appearing with a not too stable gait and a lazy smile on his face. His eyes have something languid in the way they are half lidded, and Steve can tell: he's definitely drunk and high as shit. He would recognize that cute, sleepy face between many.

The brunette doesn't want to show how affected he is by Billy's arrival; he's always worried to look pathetic or desperate with his boyfriend, so he plays the cool role, as usual.
"Hey, gorgeous." Billy mumbles, leaning loosely with his back on the doorjamb and sending what is supposed to do a malicious gaze to Steve who laughs in response.

"You're trashed." Steve comments, but there's no reproach in his voice, more like a faint trace of amusement. Billy sighs and shifts childishly on his feet. "'M not." He squabbles, petulant. Steve takes another sip of his beer and chuckles slightly. "Sure you aren't."

Billy staggers towards the coach, throwing himself loosely on it, making it creak with the fall. He stretches his arms on the backrest and crosses his leg, not even caring to take off his boots as the rules of the house command. Figures. Animal.
He reeks of alcohol and weed; Steve can't help but notice.

"You shouldn't drive in these conditions." Steve scolds him, moving his eyes on the TV again, even if he's not paying attention to the show at all. Billy groans and rolls his eyes. "What are you, my fucking mom?! Relax, princess. Nobody around at this hour." Well… this doesn't justify driving drunk and high. But Steve decides to drop the argument, since it's useless discussing it with Billy, the guy is goddamn stubborn and has this childish fixation with 'breaking the rules' and being the 'badass rebel'.

“So…” Steve starts, after an entire minute of silence, broken just by the stupid show running on the TV. “How was it?” Billy doesn’t move his gaze from the screen. He shrugs, casually, face unreadable. “Not bad, I guess. Robinson’s place is even bigger than yours, pretty boy. I guess his parents are loaded as fuck. This shithole is really a town for preppy kings.” Steve scoffs at that. After a small pause, Billy continues the story.

“…That chick… Sarah. Jesus! She was glued to me all the time. Fucking annoying. I can’t stand her voice!”

Sarah. The same cheerleader who kissed Billy on the court, just a few hours before. Steve chuckles and finishes his beer. “You gave her false hopes, Hargrove.” He teases, moving his eyes on his beautiful, drunk boyfriend. Billy makes a face and then, without saying anything, shifts position on the couch, laying on his back and placing his head on Steve’s lap. At least, he has the shrewdness to leave his feet on the armrest, with his dirty boots out from the fabric of the furniture.

Steve starts to stroke the blonde curls, finding Billy pleasantly docile at the touch. He closes his eyes and tilts his head like a cat.

“Sorry not sorry. This big boy is already taken.” He jokes, after a while. Steve laughs back, never stopping to petting his boyfriend’s hair. “Then? What else?” he encourages him. Billy gives him a confused look, then, it seems like he remembers that Steve is still talking about his evening. He sighs, suddenly looking tired.

“We drank, smoked and played stupid games. As usual. Terry Jackson is terrified by me, ya know that?”
Terry Jackson. Yeah, how could Steve not remember the freak who got convinced to testify in Billy’s favor?

“…He thinks I’m a Satanist or something. Fuck If I know. It’s strange, though… I’m used to people be scared by me, but it had never, never happened because of something like this. It’s hilarious, that’s what it is.”
Steve can give him that. It’s pretty funny, he can’t deny it.

Billy exhales a long, languid breath, melting into Steve’s touch, then,

he opens his eyes again, even if it looks like he's doing a discrete effort in doing that. They stare at each other for a while, without saying anything. It's not easy to decipher what Billy could be thinking at the moment, since he just looks lost in his buzz, but then, what comes out next from his mouth has the power to give a chill on Steve's spine in response.

"…I could suck you off."

Steve gulps, taken aback. Billy hasn't talked maliciously or even with a voice that resembles anything remotely teasing, no, he has told that sentence flatly, as a mere proposition.
The brunette sighs and resumes the stroking on Billy's blonde curls. "You're drunk, love."

Billy makes an annoyed face at this reminder.
"Mh. So what? Still want to suck your dick."
"Maybe tomorrow. What do you think, uh?"

Billy groans, petulant, like a child whose game has been stolen. But Steve can recognize the tiredness of his gaze, and maybe the guy will thank him the day after for his caring. Maybe not, that's not important, though.

Steve smiles, continuing his sloppy treatment on his boyfriend's hair. "Let's get you to bed, shall we?" he asks, rhetorically, but Billy has already closed his eyes and no response comes out from his mouth. Steve scrutinizes him with a curious frown, only to realize after not much that Billy is already asleep.

"Darling, believe me, the best is to do Route 66!" Robin objects, trying to sound not too petulant about it. "I mean, it's iconic! We go from Chicago to Los Angeles… it comes handy from where we start." Liz, however, doesn't look convinced yet. She wrinkles her nose and makes a hesitant pause. "But, babe… I want to visit New York! New York, damn… we can't miss it!" she complains, putting up her best puppy eyes.

Robin sighs, she can't help it: she can't deny her girlfriend's pleading, even if it means prolonging their way like that. After all, she does

want to see NY too, to be honest. Manhattan, a place for hipsters and artists… doesn't sound too bad.

They're currently planning their trip using maps, touristic guides and a bunch of notes, sitting in Steve's dining room. The boys? Nowhere to be seen. They have left all the heavy planning on them. Figures.

Robin gets back to studying the highways, pensive, scribbling notes on her pad. It's not that she doesn't like to organize the trip… on the contrary, it's quite exciting. But where the heck are Steve and Billy now?! Sure they could show more effort in helping them, considering that it was their idea in the first place.

"Where are the idiots?" she inquires, casually, eyes glued on the maps. Liz takes a sip from her soda and answers with a pensive tone. "They went out, like, two hours ago…" she briefly explains. Robin lifts her gaze on her, raising a brow in a sign of perplexity. Liz resumes speaking, smiling tenderly like she always does. "…They had a ball, though."

At these words, Robin can't avoid groaning in exasperation. Boys! She grips her hair and sighs. "You're telling me that they went out playing basketball while we're putting all our efforts and time to plan the trip that will keep us busy for the next year?!" Liz nods, never stopping smiling, looking totally unperturbed by the fact. Figures. She's like, a sweet little thing, hardly getting mad or angry. Unlike Robin, who has found herself deeply edgy in those days, since she's about to leave her home towards the unknown and, guess what? Starting a big journey like this can be pretty exciting, sure, but also in an unsettling way.

What if something goes wrong? What if she and Liz break up in the middle of the USA, far from home? What if she has a big argument with Billy (a possibility that also looks really realistic)? Damn, there are an infinite variable of bad situations that could happen, and Robin doesn't want to arrive unprepared for them.
Yeah, she knows; she's overthinking. But she can't help it!

At that moment, they hear the main door opening. What follows next has the power to rile up Robin even more. Billy enters the room dribbling and giggling like an idiot, flanked by Steve who's trying to

steal the ball, totally ignoring the girl seated at the table. Like they don't even exist, at all.

They smell of sweat, heavily, and they're dragging fucking mud inside the house's clean pavement with their shoes, breaking the first Casa Harrington's rule which is: no fucking shoes on the inside. Jeez! Steve is usually smarter than that, but Billy has the extraordinary power to take out the most idiotic part of him. Especially when they start their stupid competition games, as they're doing in this exact moment.

"Your form is bad, Harrington. You got out of shape lately, pretty boy." Billy mocks him, while Steve is practically grinding behind him, fighting to reach the ball. "Shut up! We end up in a draw, end of the story!" Billy scoffs at that, venomous. "Draw?! Are you high?! I don't think so, princess. I kicked your ass. And you know why? Because you suck." "Kicked my ass?! You're delusional, man!"

Robin, emanating an aura of a pure, imminent storm, gets on her feet and walks to them with severe movements. They're so busy mocking each other and exchanging banters that they don't even notice her arrival.

With a simple, sharp, gesture, she snatches the ball from Billy, placing it under her armpit while glaring at the boy with a homicidal look. Initially, Billy gasps and shoots her a shocked glance, clearly taken aback. It would be amusing if Robin weren't on the verge to shout at those impossible, dumb baboons.

"Ball seized!" she announces, with a tone that doesn't leave any trace for protests. Billy and Steve just blink at her in shock, looking like two complete morons, then, they burst into a whining show that makes them appear at least ten years younger.

"Come ooon, dude! You can't do this!" Steve cries out, throwing his arms in the air. "For real, Buckley, what the fuck is your problem?!" Billy adds, and their words are just fuel to the fire.

Robin counts to ten in her mind. She closes her eyes, exhales a long, relaxing breath, and pinches the bridge of her nose. Then, she speaks trying to collect back some sort of calm.

“We’re leaving in two days. Two. Days. And we haven’t decided the route yet.” She exhales, almost fuming with anger. “…Which is, by the way, what I and Liz were trying to do, just now. So, here’s what you’re going to do: you’re going to shower, because, believe me, you both stink, and then you’re gonna come down and sit with us. Have I made myself clear?”

A heavy silence goes by. Billy and Steve look suddenly serious, almost wary. They share a long glance, and for a moment Robin thinks that maybe her rebuke has been effective. Then, paranormally coordinated as usual, they both burst into a sneer and Robin can feel the heat crackling on her neck at that.

Billy raises his hands in surrender and speaks in an unsufferable mocking tone to his dumbass boyfriend. “I think we made her angry!” At this, Robin groans even louder and grips her hair until it starts to sting, suppressing the urge to erase that fucking grin on Billy’s face.
Steve is the first to knock some sense back; he grips his boyfriend’s shoulder and starts to guide him toward the exit of the room.

“You’re right, Rob, sorry about that… we’re going to take a shower! We’ll be back in a minute!” he mumbles, an expression akin to embarrassment on his face. Good. He should be!

They disappear upstairs, leaving Robin standing in the middle of the room, fists still clenched in anger. After a long, liberating sigh, she eventually gets back to the table, finding an amused smirk on her girlfriend’s cute face. She blushes uncontrollably at that.

“What? What’s so funny?” she inquires while trying to hide his flustered state. Liz shrugs casually.
“Nothing… just… I like it when you get bossy.” She teases her, playfully. Robin needs to put a real effort to suppress the urge to roll her eyes at that.

“Wow! It looks bigger on the inside!” Max exclaims, entering the van, over-excited. El follows her and looks like she’s thinking the same as her friend, considering how wide her smile is. “Pretty!” she chirps.

Billy, in the driver seat, grins smugly and pats the steering wheel.

“You goddamn right about that! I had to sell the Camaro, but I just fell in love with this baby.”

The girls giggle while busy poking around the van. Everything is settled for their departure; it just needs the lasts finishing touch and then it will be ready. Billy, Steve, Robin and Liz are going to leave the day after, in the morning. The route they’re going to do is still… uncertain. Billy just knows that they’re going east, till New York City. It’s enough, he really doesn’t want to plan the trip too much. It’s more exciting to go with the flow.

“Still, it’s strange to think to live in a small space like this.” Max comments, sliding a finger on the surface of the small, dining table. “…How are you even going to shower?” she inquires, then, moving her eyes on her stepbrother. “It’s not like you don’t spend *hours* getting pretty for Steve.” She mocks him, making El chuckles timidly at these words. Tsks, that little shit. Insolent as usual.

Billy scoffs and rolls his eyes. “It’s not that we won’t stay in motels or camping sites along the road if we need them. We’re not in the middle of the fucking jungle, Maxine.” He replays, sounding annoyed at Max’s bitchy questions.

Sounds adventurous. I envy you. El’s voice resonates into Billy’s mind. He grins at her. She’s now sitting at the table, timidly watching in Billy’s direction.
“You will have your own adventures when you’ll grow up, kiddo.” He says to the little girl, making Max’s eyes roll at these words. “No mind-speaking when I’m with you!” she scowls them, causing the general laughter.

“Sorry, Max… it comes… instinct… incsitint…” “…Instinctive.” Billy finishes El’s poor stammer. He can’t blame her; the kid has never had a proper education. She nods, smiling slightly. “Yeah.”

“Besides.” Billy shoots a snarky look at his stepsister. “You’re just jealous because we have sick powers and you don’t.” he mocks her, making her groan in response. “Yes, Billy, you have the power… to be super annoying!”

Other laughs and light-hearted banters follow. Then, they get to

work. El and Max help him to fix the last things in the van, moving his stuff inside of it, getting everything ready for the big departure.

It's strange, Billy feels kind of sad at the idea of leaving Max alone. He had promised that he's going to call her whenever he can, but sure isn't enough to erase his concerns about her well-being. Neil… Neil has never touched her, or Susan, but he can't trust the man. He had made her swear, swear to try to reach him if his dad is going to do any false move.
Don't worry. I will look out for her. She's safe with me. El's voice in his mind reassures him. He moves his gaze from the shelf that he's organizing to the little girl, intent on moving stoves from a box to a closet. She smiles at him.

He responds with a fake confident grin.
Out of my mind, brat. he jokes, making her giggle. Max looks at the scene and groans, throwing her arms in the air. "You're doing it again!" she complains, high-pitched voice, looking almost offended.

El makes a sly grin and shrugs. "Don't know what you're talking about." Billy can't avoid chuckling at these words, feeding Max's raging outrage. She shoots a dirty glare at her stepbrother, then, she moves her sight on her friend, crossing her arms on her chest.

"You two!" she sighs, after a while.

They spend all the afternoon getting the van ready. At around five pm, Billy gives a lift to El to the Byers'. Once arrived, they get out to the van to say hello to them, even if Billy is bad with 'this kind of shit'. Goodbyes aren't exactly his specialty. Joyce, Jon and Will reach them, a wide smile on their faces at the sight of the brand-new vehicle. Joyce gives him a bone-crushing hug while Jonathan watches the scene aside, hands hooked on his pocket in his usual 'weirdo' posture, flanked by his little brother.

"It's so great that you can spend time traveling… discover the country, be free!" Joyce exhales with a dreamy voice. Billy chuckles slightly at that. "Yeah… adult responsibilities can come later, right?"
He really likes Joyce, she's like, the momma prototype. Well, the good mother, not the fuckable mother. Eww!

Thing is, he doesn't know the woman that much, but he feels very grateful toward her. He's just bad at showing that kind of shit, but he has the feeling that Joyce knows and understands.

"Mom…" Will claims his mother's attention timidly. "The Party is going to Steve's this night, can we go too?" he points at himself and then at El, who flutters her eyelashes, looking like a doe. Joyce smiles all sweet as usual. "Of course you can, sweetie!" "I can give them a lift." Jonathan points out. "I was going to Steve's with Nancy later. He, uh, invited us too."

Billy needs to repress the urge to facepalm at this. That dork! The last fucking night they're gonna sleep in a comfortable room and he invites the world for a goodbye party?!
He disguises his real thoughts and puts up the fakest smile under the snarky gaze of Max. "All right. I still have to go home first. We'll see each other in a couple of hours, ok?" he informs. Jon nods, mumbling something like 'sure thing', while Max shoots him an inquisitive glance.

Once inside the van again, Billy explains sharply: "There's something that I need to do before." his stepsister doesn't object at that, but it's evident how she's trying to keep back the avalanche of bitchy questions that she wants to make. Well, all in good time.

There's still a box under his bed. That damned box he hasn't dared to open or neither to get rid of yet. He can't go on and leave it there like nothing ever happened. Now he feels like he's really ready to put back those stinging memories, once for all.

There's a fireplace in the backyard of their shitty home in Cherry Road. Billy is standing in front of the fire, the box in his hand and his stepsister next to him, looking at crackling flames.

"Don't you want to open it a last time before you burn it?" Max inquires, looking vaguely apprehensive towards him. Billy shrugs and makes a face. "I know what's inside." He spats, sounding almost annoyed. He finally throws the box inside the fire that flares up in reaction.

They stare at it for a while. It's summer and the fire brings additional

heat. It's strange that someone is making a fire at that moment, that's for sure. Maybe the neighborhood is going to tell Neil, but it's not a problem for him anymore.

Billy speaks atone.
"…There is a Black Sabbath concert ticket." He starts to list. Max blinks, vaguely surprised. She didn't expect him to do that, it's evident. Billy makes a pause, taking his sweet time. He remembered the day Nathan had given him the ticket, as a present. That one has been one of the best concerts of his life. One of the best nights.

"…There are a few polaroids of us at gigs he organized." He continues, without any trace of passion, face blank and emotionless. He remembers those pictures. There is one where he's doing stagediving on the crowd. That one is super cool! Well, was, super cool. He doesn't want to keep it. Another one of them outside the club, grinning all shitfaced. Billy had a black eye in that picture because of a brawl that happened in the same night. Another picture of them in Nathan's shithole apartment. In the bed, together.

Fuck them all. He has new, great memories, now. He's creating new ones. Building a solid present, a new past, a promising future.

"…There is a book he gave me that I have never read. The same old shit about anarchy… fuck if I ever cared about it. There is… there is a horrible drawing of us in Tijuana. He said that we would have moved there, and we would have lived near the ocean, smoking dope and drinking rum all day long. Like… pirates." Max snorts out a laugh at that.

He can't avoid smiling too, and that's stupid, and strange. This is the first time that a memory of him brings a smile and not a stinging sensation of pain in his chest. It's kind of a new sensation… it's like the anger, the deep sense of betrayal and hurt he had felt toward the boy is now vanished, leaving a new, bittersweet sense of melancholy, so strange and foreign for him.

He remembers what he and Steve had said about 'bad things that happen for a reason', about forgiving people who treated you like shit for yourself, to feel better. He thinks that maybe he is getting it, now. He doesn't feel anger toward his ex… and it feels better. Jesus, if it

does! It's like, getting rid of an enormous burden. Liberating as fuck.
"…I don't think I hate him anymore." Billy admits, after a while. There's an acre smell of burnt plastic in the air, and the black smoke that is spiraling from the flames looks way too toxic. "…I don't think I love him, either. I stopped doing both the things."

Yeah, and it's fucking incredible how you can hate someone with all your heart because you can't fucking stop loving that person. A tricky, shitty paradox.

"Did you forgive him?" Max inquires, looking at him, genuinely curious. Billy answers with a noncommittal shrug. "It's not about forgiveness, I think. Just… move on. Turn the page." Perhaps his stepsister is too young to understand that kind of shit. Perhaps not. She's clever as hell, after all.
It's a big emotional moment, so Billy can't really shut his tongue. He speaks again, keeping his pensive frown on the fire ahead of him.

"I wish I could do the same. With my mother, with Neil… just, I don't know. Make them not able to hurt me anymore. Make them just ghosts of the past."

Yeah, it sounds utopistic, he knows. They're his parents, after all. But a man can dream. Max spends some seconds in silence, probably thinking about what Billy has just said. Finally, he moves his gaze on her. She looks lost: brows furrowed in a pensive frown, biting nervously her lip. Billy smirks and ruffles her hair, under her laments, lightening up the atmosphere.

"Don't sweat it, shitbird!" he tells his standard line, finally moving away from that way too hot and smokey fire. Max moves the disheveled strands back to her ears and follows him with a small run. "Can I have your room now?" she asks, while walking alongside the house with him. Billy scoffs, mean. "Nope." he just spats, then, causing a loud groan from his stepsister in response.

"That's not fair! You don't need it anymore! How can you be so…" but the girl must stop her complaints when she realizes the presence of her stepfather in front of the entrance of the house. Billy is standing frozen on his spot, looking at the man with a poker face. He knew he was going to meet him before the departure, so, it's nothing

new. But still, a small part of him can't avoid feeling scared, an ancient, guttural fear. Neil had stopped to torment him in the last months, had completely ignored him, limiting their conversation to a few simple exchanges of lines, like they're strangers under the same roof. But what if he has changed his mind now?

Billy gulps and clenches his fists. His tension is visible, so is Neil's. The man is in front of the main door. It looks like he was about to go inside and then he has crossed his path with them. A few meters divide them, and it seems like no one knows what to do. Billy can feel Max's apprehensive gaze on him, but he doesn't look back. His eyes are pointed to men who transformed his life into a living hell.

Finally, after what is perceived as an eternity, Neil speaks to Max. "Maxine, I need to exchange a few words with my son." He announces. She shoots a worried glance at Billy, who finally turns to face her and squeezes her shoulder. "It's ok. Go inside." She nods and obeys, surpassing Neil's figure without looking at him. Better, because Billy is sure as hell that Max doesn't really need to start acting cocky with his father, glaring at him as she can afford it. She should keep her head down, and he really wishes she will continue to do so even without him in the house.

Neil approaches him, face blank and unreadable. Billy keeps eye contact without moving an inch, trying to disguise his real nervousness about their imminent confrontation. Well, he can't avoid that, after all, it's something he needs to do. It's like closing a chapter of his life.

Neil is standing in front of him now. He looks… strange. Not mad, though. More… vaguely distressed? Billy can't read his expression properly and it makes him wary, because he's not very sure how to prepare himself for what will come next.

"Let's get inside too, uh?" he says, after a while. Billy's spine is crossed by an uncontrolled shiver. Maybe his father wants to get him away from prying eyes to beat him until he's not able to escape from home.
He tries to hide his fear, tries to play cool.

"I think I'm ok here." He retorts, venomous. Neil sighs and pinches

the bridge of his nose. Like Billy is being the difficult one, the impossible child. That fucker!
“Billy…” he hisses then, glaring at him. “…Please.”

Ok. What the fuck?
Billy blinks like an idiot for some seconds, taken aback. He had never, never heard his father asking something ‘nicely’ to him. His father orders and gets. Nothing else. Well, maybe he should appreciate the effort…

Fuck his effort. He’s a piece of shit, he deserves nothing! a loud voice reminds him inside his head. Neil is still there, looking at him with predator’s eyes. His eyes could never become kind. Could never look at him with something else than disdain. However, in the end, Billy decides to indulge his request, even if he doesn’t know why.

If Neil decides to lay a finger on him, he can always use his freaky mind-power. Even if he really, really doesn’t want to. He fears that he could lose control with the subject.
They go into his now empty, bare room, the same room where Neil had beaten him a lot of times, never listening to his pleads, to his request for forgiveness.

Neil looks uneasy, Billy can tell. Even awkward. An odd vision.
He rubs his jaw, looking absently toward the window. Billy is just waiting for him to finally talk.

What comes out next from his mouth is the least expected, which has the power to make Billy gasps in surprise while a violent chill runs all over his body.

“…Your mother called when you turned eighteen.”

Suddenly, Billy’s mind goes dizzy. The thoughts become whirling and blurry, while his heart starts to hammer in his chest.
His mother. She called.
He doesn’t even know how to feel about it, it’s just too much. Neil is still avoiding eye contact, and that’s kind of appreciated, by the way, because Billy hates to feel and be like that in front of him.

“…She wanted to talk to you. But I didn’t let her.” Neil goes on.

Billy's mouth feels dry while his eyes are suddenly watering without control. "Why didn't you tell me before…?" his voice comes out cracked and hoarse, on the verge of tears.

Neil sighs and rubs his eyes, tiredly. It almost looks like he's trying to keep back the tears too, but that would be impossible. No, not him. Fathers never cry.
"…Didn't want to make you feel bad." He exhales, after a while, eyes glued to the ground. Billy almost scoffs at that. "So what? You're telling me now because now you want to make me feel like shit? Is that so?!" Is it another mind trick?! He has stopped beating him, so now maybe he wants to destroy him mentally, break him until it will remain just thousands of little pieces of his poor, scattered brain.

Neil shakes his head and finally looks at him, brows furrowed, and jaw clenched.

"I have never tried to make you feel like shit. You don't understand, what I've done, I've done it for you." His voice is starting to rise, and Billy's blood becomes hotter. It's good to feel rage against him, it's better than fear and weakness. He can handle it. He's not going to break, for now.

"Didn't we already talk about that?! You're the worst father that I could ever have!" Billy snarls the heavy words to the man's face, breathing raggedly through his nostrils, glaring daggers at him, moved by pure, primordial hatred. It feels great to say that. Liberating, almost inebriating… like a drug. But Billy knows how it is a volatile sensation. Anger bursts are always ephemeral. Never really useful, in the long term.

Neil takes a step back. Maybe he's also keeping back his fists, who knows. He looks intensively at his son, and it's strange, the heavy seconds that pass before he speaks again. It's not something common by him.
Again, what comes out next from his mouth has the power to shock Billy.

"…What about you? Do you think you're a good son?"

He gasps like a fish, not able to give a straight response. But Neil

doesn't leave him the time to do it: he goes on talking, voice sour and full of contempt.
"You've been causing troubles since you were a kid. You cheated, lied, betrayed my trust. And… your music, the way you dress… you drink, you smoke… you have always tried everything just to be against my authority!"

Billy would like to say how false Neil's words are. He has never tried to make him mad on purpose, it's more like his life would have been great without him at all. That's insane! It can't be true… can it?

"You're not a good son. You're not a good person, either." This time, his father's voice is grave, almost surrendered.

He's right. You're a shitty son and a shitty person. You hurt people, you killed people. there's still his internal self who is agreeing with his dad, but Billy must not listen to it, otherwise, the creaks that are starting to spread on his thick layers of skin will break definitely. No, he's not like that. Steve doesn't think it, Max doesn't think it… he has friends who love him. He's not alone anymore.

Neil sighs.
"…I failed with you." He exhales, in the end, moving again his sight on the window. "…Sooner or later, I just hope you realized that. I tried my best, but you're past redemption."
Redemption. What a funny word to choose. Billy grits his teeth and gets closer to his father, challenging him with his heavy gaze. Not angry. Not afraid. Maybe just… embittered. Because seriously, there's an abyss between them that could never be filled. They could never, never feel something toward each other different than disdain. Yeah, they are past redemption, beyond reparation.

Billy knows what to do now. He wishes he could have a box of memories to erase too, to put an end to the long chapter of Neil's dread into his life. At least, it would be symbolically relevant.
"…So you are." He hisses, in the end.

Their conversation is over, no need to continue it. He twists and opens the door, calling Max who has been not too surprisingly behind the door the whole time. Neil follows him with a steady gait.

“Where are you going?! What are you doing?!” he yells, outraged. Billy freezes on his spot, almost colliding with his stepsister at the sudden stop, and speaks without turning to face his father.

“…I’m leaving. Forever.”

Silence. He wonders how Neil’s face could be.
Then, yeah, fuck it. Why not.
He speaks with a sly grin. His father can’t see it, it’s just a grin for himself, like an inside-joke only he can understand.

“…With my boyfriend.”

No need to add anything else. He exits the home, feeling like he’s able to breathe again after years spent drowning. Max follows him trotting by his side.
He lights up a cigarette, smoke fills his lungs. Breathe again. After centuries. Nicotine has never felt this oxygenating.

What could ever be the last dinner in Hawkins before the great brand-new start?
A pizza party, of course.

The dining room is filled with chatters and hollers, the brats are screaming, over-excited as usual. Steve spills coke from his nose for something stupid Dustin has just said. The kid reacts patting his back way too strong, only getting the situation worse.

“Dude! Don’t die just now!” Dustin jokes, attempting his pizza. “Yeah, Steve. We made a list of possible ways you all could die for in this journey, and choking on your drink isn’t on it!” Will explains, grinning as if he weren’t talking about the ways Steve could die in the imminent future. The brunette coughs and wipes his tears, face red due to the recent near-death experience.

“What-” he spats, voice hoarse and cracked, toward the mini-Byers. “You seriously made a list of ways we could die…?” “Of course we did!” Dustin talks back, way too aloud. He then starts to fumble in the pockets of his sleeveless jacket, looking for the infamous list.

Steve facepalms. Honestly, those kids?! They're fucking nuts, that's what they are.

Dustin dramatically clears his voice and starts to read, under Steve's perplexed gaze. It's him, Dustin, Will, Lucas and Mike who are gathered at that side of the table, while El and Max are busy in a deep conversation with Nancy and Jonathan, who are giggling for something Max has just said. Billy is outside, smoking. He's usually smoking everywhere in Steve's place, but he has made up the rule to do it outside more often. After all, he doesn't want to leave the house stinking of smoke to his parents.

His parents… a hard train of thought. Obviously, his father didn't react well to the news of the road trip, saying that it was a waste of time and money. Figures. Anyway, it's not that he has the power to choose for Steve anymore. Besides, Steve is starting to consider the idea of the college, now. In his mental plan, he could try to get into college the year after. Robin and Liz are on the same mind, while Billy… well, who knows what the guy wants. He's not keen on planning things in life, generally.

Steve will think about his future, his adult life as his father wants, but for now, it's time to discover the country and make new experiences. Fuck the school. He should have thought it before, but honestly, he was completely lost after his graduation.

But now… even if he's going on an adventure, things are starting to look much clearer to him. Some time to find himself is exactly what he needs. Fuck society's expectation. He has all the life ahead of him for work and responsibilities, what about living a little?
Steve is grateful, because, without Billy, he could have never understood that. He was trapped in a limbo of uncertainty and doubt, constantly waiting for something that he quite couldn't catch… he needed exactly a person like him to get a move to his life.

He's spacing out. He gets back to reality, watching Dustin busy reading the damn list. He has lost a good half of it, but, he can guess what it could contain, after all.
"…Dying because the van explodes. Dying because of Billy's reckless driving, dying because…" "Hey!" Steve interrupts him, sounding almost offended. "Give the guy some credit! Sure, his driving is…

sporty, but he's not gonna kill us all!" Mike scoffs at these words. "Actually-" he points to a few lines of the list, an annoyed, almost smug grimace on his face. "Billy is involved in most cases, if you check."

Steve snatches out the paper from Dustin's hand, snarling something like 'gimmie that!', and starts to examine their written previsions. After finishing the reading, he can't avoid groaning aloud and rolling his eyes. "You've been overly-dramatic!" he declares, decisive. Lucas takes the list back, almost breaking it with the sudden movement. "Dude, we've been realistic for your own sake. What about 'Billy gets flayed and put you all in the truck'?!" Steve scoffs. "Hardly possible. Since we haven't got a truck at all, it's a van, dipshit. Not a car."

"The fuck are you all babbling about?" His boyfriend's sudden voice from behind his back makes Steve wince in an uncontrolled reflex, like a jittery animal. He lifts his head at him, chuckling almost nervously. "Nothing… the brats made a list of possible ways we could die in our trip. Cute, isn't it?" Billy makes a face and a noncommittal hum, acting as if he doesn't give a shit about it, at all. And it's probably like that. He raises one of the two bottles he's holding in his hands to his mouth, and then, with a sharp, strong, pressure, he opens it… with his teeth. Ok, Steve must admit; that's pretty impressive, but he doesn't want to show it, not to feed the already gigantic ego of his asshole boyfriend. Billy spits the bottle's cap on the ground (gross!), under the shocked gazes of the brats.

"I've got a bottle opener, you know…" Steve jokes, just to receive a casual shrug in response. "Doesn't matter." Billy mumbles. "Is that for me?" Steve inquires, instinctively reaching a hand to the bottle, but the other boy promptly moves his hand away from him, preventing him from catching the beer. "…Nope." Billy grins maliciously, popping the 'p'. Then, he approaches Jonathan and passes him the bottle, making Steve's eyes rolling back in response.

Such a teasing douchebag!

Billy gives the other bottle to Nancy, this time opening it with a knife, as if he's just trying to annoy the hell out of Steve by not using the damn bottle opener as a normal person would, and honestly, knowing Billy is probably like it.

“ANYWAY-” Dustin resumes the speech, sounding pissed by Steve’s boyfriend interruption. “Because we love you and care a lot about you, we also had made a survival guide for your road trip!” he announces, over-enthusiastic, starting to fumble on his backpack. Steve sighs in commotion, furrowing his brows and moving a hand on his chest.
“Oh dude… you shouldn’t have!”

“It’s not a present. We made it because you’ll probably get killed if you don’t learn a few survival skills!” Lucas objects, but, nevertheless, that’s so… cute.
Dustin leans a heavy book on the table with a loud thump. It’s handmade, even the binding… on the cover, there’s a drawing made by Will of their van, and big writing in colorful shapes that says: THE PARTY GUIDE TO SURVIVE A ROAD TRIP.

Seriously?! Steve could cry just for this. Everyone’s attention is now on them. Billy moves behind Steve and shoots an inquisitive glare to the book. “The fuck is that?!” he spats, sounding almost disgusted. Figures. Heartless bastard. Dustin sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose.

“This… my friend, it’s a customized guide for you, ungrateful punks.” He declares, giving himself an air of importance, even solemnness. Still, Billy doesn’t look very impressed, though. He just glares at the book with a not-too-subtle grimace.

Will starts to browse the book, talking with some kind of heat, not able to keep back his enthusiasm. He’s cute, with that glimpse on his eyes, and Steve is pretty sure that the brain under that idea must be his, Will the Wise.

“It contains everything, from counter-culture fantasy touristic guides to proper instruction about how to make an improvised radio in case your van dies in the middle of the desert. Everything you need for your journey!” he explains, while Steve’s eyes are glued on the book, mouth in a ridiculous ‘o’ shape.

Honestly? It’s amazing. And also, the sweetest thing that anyone has ever done for him. For them, technically. Nancy and Jonathan are looking at the scene few seats away with a heartfelt smile, while El

and Max have reached them, placing themselves behind Steve's back.

They browse the book for a while, commenting on Will's drawings and the Party's survival tips. It looks like a long work; they will have spent entire weeks doing this… Steve needs to do a heavy effort to hold back the tears.

He gives a bone-crushing bear hug to each one of the brats, not stopping to thank them, to tell them how much the book is appreciated, tooth-rotting sweet.

When he finishes expressing his gratitude to everyone, he turns to Billy, who has been silent and strangely aloof. The boy has a pensive frown on his face, his brows are furrowed, and his mouth is cracked in the slight grimace that Steve loves so much. He looks away, almost squirming on his spot, almost awkwardly.

"This… is good shit. Uhm… thanks." he mumbles, then, never looking to the brats. Steve decides to tease him a little, because, honestly? The guy always deserves it. "What?! We couldn't hear you, Billy. Speak aloud." He groans in response and shoots Steve a nasty glare. "Now don't push it, Harrington!"

Max chuckles slyly at the scene and soon supports Steve in annoying the hell out of her stepbrother. "I think Billy wants a hug!" she declares, maliciously, gaining a dirty look by him. "Don't you dare, you little shit…" but he can't continue; everyone is on him, hugging and crushing him, voluntary making Billy uncomfortable with the infamous physical contact, under the laughs of Nancy and Jonathan who assists amused at the scene.

"Get the fuck away from me, you stinky brats!" Billy laments, high-pitched voice, shaking the kids of himself, but it's not that he's putting too much energy in it, it's just a show, Steve can tell. Deep down, under that thick skin, Billy secretly loves the brats too. But he could never say it aloud.

"Who's driving?" Robin inquires, casually, jumping in the van. Her figure glows positivity, somehow, today: she's got a big, shiny smile on her face, a strange flower-shaped dress, oddly feminine

considering her usual style, and the blonde strands tied in a ponytail. Liz gets in after her, thumbs hooked in her purple backpack. She's wearing flip-flops and a bikini costume is visible under the tank top. Maybe she expects to reach the sea in a day, or maybe it's just the perfect outfit for a journey that will be hot as hell.

Billy, already in the driving seat, an arm leaning loosely on the window and a hand gripping the steering wheel, grins all teeth. He's got his sunglasses on and the red shirt completely open, showing the defined abs.

"Me, of course." He says, like a matter of fact. Steve places himself in the seat next to him and shrugs. "Nothing to object on it." he declares. Robin and Liz look on the same mind.
Billy starts the engine and revs it. "So… ladies. Are you ready? You're still in time to change your mind if you chicken out." Robin scoffs. "You wish, Hargrove!" Liz, seated next to her, giggles lightheartedly, moving a hand on her mouth. "I'm super excited!"

"Good." Billy smirks, then, he starts to drive. "Say hello to this shithole then!" Liz and Robin wave their hands in unison. "Helloooo!"

Steve chuckles. Inside him, his heart is hammering in nervousness and excitement. This is a big start, the brats aren't too wrong about it, after all: it could really happen anything in a long, adventurous journey like that. Besides… he has been literally dragged by fate. He has never decided anything for himself, he has just… followed the flow.

There is a part of Steve that can't avoid feeling scared. He could change his mind along the way, he could realize it has all been a great mistake, maybe he and Billy are going to argue and break up in the middle of nowhere!

The number of unexpected events that could happen is infinite. But, there's a thing that Steve has understood, finally: future can't be controlled or planned, and, sometimes, the fear of the unknown becomes so paralyzing that can freeze you on your spot. Control is an illusion. Fuck control! Nothing is ever going to be like you had planned. The sooner you accept it, the better you can live with it.

Take Billy, for example. Steve would have never, never believed that he could have ended up being his boyfriend. Jeez, he was even completely oblivious about his bisexuality just less than a year before!

Before having him into his life, Steve was almost dormant. His life was in a standby mode, waiting to understand what to do with it, what he really wants from it. Billy has awakened him, has made him feel alive again.

The Steve of one year ago could have never, never agreed to start a road trip, without knowing exactly where to go and what would have happened on the way. He would have been too scared to freak out, to have panic attacks caused by trivial stuff that would make him look like a total weirdo. But now it's different; he feels stronger, his mind is solid, his defenses built up. Now he can afford it.

And it's all thanks to Billy, but mostly to himself. Because, loving someone is the reason why we become better persons, but the work on ourselves it's ours in the first place. Love is just the fuel of it. In the end, we should be always grateful to ourselves.

"Who's choosing the music?!" Robin's high voice breaks his train of thoughts. By now, they have left Hawkins behind their backs. They're in the deep forest, heading toward the east coast.

"Me, silly girl!" Billy answers in a mocking tone, making Steve grunt at that. "Babe, I really, really, don't want to listen to the Slayers in the early morning." He exhales tiredly. Billy licks his lips, ferine. "You're lame, Harrington. What about Black Sabbath?" "…Jesus!" "Metallica?" "Billy…" "Iron Maiden? Come ooon, they're not that heavy."

Steve sighs and facepalms. Yeah, it will be a long, hard trip. He forgot how many hours of driving they have ahead, and how many hours of heavy metal it will bring with it.
"Hold on guys…" Robin declares, fumbling pensively in the box of tapes, looking for the perfect one. Steve trusts more his friend's taste than Billy's, to be honest. She could come up with the perfect solution.

Finally, Robin raises the perfect tape, with a satisfied smirk on her face.

“What about Lou Reed?!” she proposes, but she already knows the answer. Billy pretends to think about it, just to make a show, while Liz claps her hands enthusiastically.
Lou Reed. It reminds Steve of the first time they hooked up in the quarry, that crazy, absurd, unexpected night. Well, it was kind of expected, to be honest, considering the amount of time they had spent dancing around in a circle, teasing and flirting until the situation got unbearable. He turns to Billy, and, for a moment, he has the feeling that maybe the guy is thinking about the same. He has a pensive gaze, difficult to read.

Then, the boy ‘surrenders’ and sighs. “All right, all right, Buckley. Good old Reed is always appreciated.”

The song starts, the same old song they were listening to that night. It has become kind of their song, after all. Billy has brought him on the wild side. Or brought him back? Nah, that’s impossible. There is no going back. Everything is new, and exciting and intense with him. Everything needs to be discovered.

And they finally have time.

Billy notices his zoning out and moves a hand on his knee.

“You alright?” he inquires, casually. Steve grabs his hand and brings it to his mouth, then, he kisses the knuckles.

He smiles on Billy’s skin.

“…Never been better.”

Notes for the Chapter:

> Ahhh.... I can't believe it! We're here! Congratulation to you!
>
> Considering the shitty hard times we're currently

living, it's good to imagine an ending with people who travel and go for an adventure, full of hopes and positive vibes... it's nice to dream, isn't it? ahaha

So, I could definitely write more adventures of the gang... I have grown fond of them!
Thank you so much for reading this. I hope this made you laugh and smile a little bit. We need it :)

Author's Note:

Hello everyone!
English is not my first language, so, be patient about typos. I humbly apologize!
Each chapter is entitled by a song, the title of the work refers to a beautiful song by the band Still Corners :)